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How international students navigate the social and academic practices of a South African university

by

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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University of Cape Town

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to qualitatively explore how international students navigated the social and academic practices of a South African university. A sample of thirteen students was selected from the Humanities faculty at the University of Cape Town, each of whom was a visiting student for either one semester or a full academic year. Participants volunteered for one-hour, face-to-face interviews which were tape-recorded for later analysis. The interviews were semi-structured, as the author hoped to elicit particular critical moments in the student's study-abroad journey. Two groups of students were sought for purposes of validation and comparison: Group 1 consisted of nine American students; Group 2 consisted of four students from other countries. The focus, however, was primarily upon the experiences of the students from the U.S.

The theoretical framework for the study was drawn from the work of social theorists James Gee and Pierre Bourdieu. Their interest in the differential distribution of power in the social world – particularly within academia – and in how the individual gains or loses power as s/he moves in that world provided helpful frames for exploring how international students negotiated often unfamiliar contexts encountered while studying abroad.

To operationalize the theoretical framework, Anthony Giddens' concept of "fateful moments" was utilized. Following other researchers, the concept was altered to "critical moments." Critical moments are moments in a subject's narrative which cause disjunctures to arise in the life journey; they are moments of crisis which demand navigational choices to be made.

In analysis of the data, these moments were located either by the interviewee's identification or the author's interpretation. In order to aid analysis practices were split into two domains: social and academic. Data was then clustered according to themes which arose in the interviews.

In relation to social practices, common themes were related to "with whom to socialize" and to national and racial identities. American students in particular were deliberate in stating their intent to meet "local" students and to create distance from other Americans. Issues related to national and racial identity arose strongly across all of the interviews and influenced both their practices as well as those of "local" students.

In relation to academic practices, themes related to academic support, academic expectations, and tacit academic procedures were predominant. When faced with unknown practices students often engaged in a compare-and-contrast activity, drawing upon known

practices from their home institutions to serve as the standard by which new practices were judged.

However, although splitting practices into two domains was helpful for analysis, students' practices often cut across them. For example, issues related to national and racial identity often occurred both in and out of the classroom.

Based on the findings of this thesis as well as the literature, the author concludes with suggestions for future study-abroad programmes. Specifically, he focuses upon the pre-orientation component of such programmes, suggesting that students may be more fully prepared to engage their study-abroad experience by being introduced to a particular perspective of the social world based on the social theories of Gee and Bourdieu.

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Chapter 1: Internationalization and study-abroad programmes

The international study-abroad experience often places the student in social spaces where s/he encounters various social and academic practices which may be new and unfamiliar. In this encounter the student may experience moments of both continuity and disjuncture, moments which give rise to questions regarding the objective and subjective forces of the social world, and how social power is gained, lost, and arbitrarily recognized.

This study is catalyzed by the ever-growing reality of internationalization, a concept which will be explored below, and the effects it is having on higher education. Universities across the globe are responding to this reality in a number of ways, from shifts in policy and practice to the adoption of entirely new paradigms that are deemed appropriate for the “global village” of the 21st century. One particular response to internationalization is the development and increasing profile of study-abroad programmes within tertiary education. These programmes typically entail sending students to a host university overseas for a period of time, ranging from a few weeks to a semester or a full year. This project limits its focus to students who have engaged in an academic sojourn abroad for either one semester or one year.

That the study-abroad journey is not a straight-forward one, free of obstacles and barriers of various kinds, is clear in the literature. While internationalization has catalyzed the cross-border movement of students in ways that facilitate constructive personal enrichment, it is nevertheless not an uncomplicated journey. Students who study and live at an overseas institution often encounter a variety of social and academic practices which are unfamiliar to them. Familiar social discourses and social power which had been acquired and found to be useful – and perhaps taken-for-granted – at the home university are no longer how things operate in the new social and academic settings. This is a movement into new places where, however arbitrarily, other sorts of capital are valued and where other ways of acting, speaking, and being are required in order to become a legitimate participant. There arises tension between how the student recognized and utilized power at the home institution and how power is differentially distributed in the new one.

With the aid of interviewees’ representations of their practices, gathered through one-on-one interviewing, the present research sets out to answer the following question: How do international students navigate the social and academic practices of a South African university? Are there “critical moments” in their journey which have enabled them to negotiate a place within the new social and academic spaces of the host institution? Do they

recognize how their resources for practice, which may have been legitimate at their home institution, have lost or gained value in new contexts? How do they represent their navigation of these disjunctures? The present research ventures to offer an answer to these questions.

The remainder of the chapter will provide the reader with a brief introduction to the context of the study. It begins with an introduction to the terms “globalization” and “internationalization” and their impact upon higher education. Study-abroad programmes will in turn be explored, followed by a brief look at how each of the above elements has come to impact Africa, in particular South Africa and the institutional site for this study, the University of Cape Town.

As an international student myself at the University, I have experienced the disjunctures alluded to above: the feeling of being out of step and yet knowing that I had to make sense of these new practices if I was to move legitimately within them. My own experience as an international student who has encountered new social and academic practices is one of the catalysts which drives my interest in this topic. I will return to my personal interests in this topic below.

Globalization and internationalization in higher education

The impetus for the present study finds its roots in the linked phenomena of *globalization* and *internationalization*, particularly as these continue to exert an ever-growing influence within the field of higher education in recent decades. McCabe (2001) notes that although these terms have garnered significant attention in the literature in recent years, the definitions available vary widely. He writes that this lack of clarity muddies the waters at a time when these phenomena – with their concomitant political, economic, and technological changes – impact not only nations but systems of higher education around the globe.

In an effort to gain clarity, I have chosen from the literature definitions of these two terms which I believe are clear and cohesive. “Globalization,” McNamee and Faulkner (2001) write, “refers to a process by which economic, political, and cultural institutions and activities are increasingly spilling beyond national borders, spanning the globe, and changing the conduct of social life for particular nations, communities, and individuals” (72). Internationalization, on the other hand, “...is more oriented toward bilateral and/or multilateral processes involving knowledge of specific countries, which leads to the development of business, educational, social, and cultural relationships” (McCabe, 2001:141). In the context of higher education, internationalization is the response of an academic institution or system, in terms of policies and practices, to this global reality

(Altbach and Knight, 2007:290). Knight (2004) offers a definition tailored to its presence within higher education: "...the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (11).

Internationalization as an academic enterprise is not an entirely new phenomenon. Altbach and Teichler (2001) note that the original universities, begun in Paris and Bologna in the 13th century, were truly international in scope. These early centers of learning employed Latin as the *lingua franca*, or common language, in order to study a variety of disciplines which were drawn from various parts of Europe and beyond. In addition, professors and students often hailed from various national and ethnic backgrounds (6). The intellectual reach of higher education, almost from the very beginning, extended well beyond national borders.

McNamee and Faulkner (2001) note that with the increasing interdependency between and across national boundaries, universities are prioritizing international education for their students (74). For example, in response to the realities of globalization, the American Council on Education (ACE) produced a document in 1995 which called for "...universities to expand the understanding of languages, cultures, and global issues" amongst their students (74). Various tertiary education organizations have issued memorandums similar to that produced by ACE. These responses indicate a confidence by university leaders in the importance of educating and exposing their students (and their faculty) to the differences of culture and worldview across the globe. However, it must be noted that this confidence often seems to be taken-for-granted and must be made explicit and thoughtfully considered. A tacit conviction in the positive and progressive effects of study-abroad education that acknowledges only part of the global picture is, at best, incomplete and, at worst, ethnocentric and potentially abusive to the host culture/university. Although such ideologies are related and require careful attention by concerned academics, they extend beyond the scope of the present research.

Knight (2004) notes that the traditional rationales for internationalization have been social/cultural, political, economic, and academic (21), some of which are evident above. One factor of increasing importance is the growing emphasis on institutional branding as academic competition at the global level has increased (21). While institutions have always been competitive in the sense of seeking to increase the quality of their educational offerings, changes in global realities have pushed many universities to actively pursue the development of an international reputation (22). While high academic quality continues to be important, it has perhaps been subsumed by an overarching quest to compete on the national and the international stages (26).

That the University of Cape Town (UCT) is responding to the forces of globalization is clear in its statements regarding internationalization (Appendix E). Likewise, universities in other parts of the world, notably the United States and Europe, have developed tighter links with UCT. For example, the number of international students studying at UCT has increased almost four-fold since 1997. Although further elaboration of internationalization at UCT will be discussed below, it deserves note here that the leaders of the university which serves as the site for this research are cognizant of the effects of globalization, seeking both to develop its academic quality and to bolster its reputation abroad.

Internationalization and study-abroad programmes

Study-abroad programmes¹ have come to play an increasingly important role in the internationalization process and are one of the principal ways in which universities have responded to internationalization. For example, a number of federal initiatives in the United States have targeted study-abroad as an imperative of American higher education in the 21st century. A recent report issued by a American federal commission on study-abroad programmes (Nov 2005) has called for an increase in the number of American students going abroad to 1 million students annually by the 2016-2017 academic year (Dolby, 2007:143).

Study-abroad programmes are sponsored by universities themselves as well as para-university agencies. Altbach and Teichler (2001) note the key role that exchange agencies have played in the growth of international study-abroad programmes, from raising awareness to sponsoring programmes and stimulating mobility (9). The first such programmes were established in the United States in 1919 (the Institute of International Education) and in Europe in 1925 (the German Academic Exchange Service) (9). Since that time the number of sponsoring organizations has experienced steady growth, keeping pace with the economic and technological changes of globalization (9).

While the United States remains a dominant player in international education, both as a sender and as a host, Europe's ERASMUS programme, established by the EU in 1987, is also an important participant, supporting 100,000 students annually (Altbach and Teichler, 2007:9). Estimating on a global level, Knight (2008) forecasts international study-abroad participation to expand from 1.8 million students in 2000 to 7 million in 2025.

¹ Woolf defines study-abroad as "...an educational programme whereby U.S. students go abroad for a part of their degree and for which they receive credits that transfer back into their scheme of study" (2007:496).

That internationalization has increasingly come to influence the programmes and policies of tertiary educational institutions is without doubt. Governments and other agencies have instituted various policies calling for a more deliberate focus within tertiary education upon study-abroad programmes, for reasons both academic and economic. Barring the rise of unforeseen global or economic obstacles in the years to come, study-abroad programmes will likely take a more central place in the life of the university, especially within institutions who believe in the value of cross-border learning for their students and are resolved to grow their reputation as an *international* university. But how are these developments in higher education being felt in South Africa in particular? How are South African universities responding to internationalization?

Internationalization and study-abroad programmes in South Africa

In an article on the effects of internationalization on South African higher education since 1994, Rouhani (2007) notes the disparate ways in which various institutions have responded to the phenomenon. Some universities have been quick to develop international offices in order to encourage and manage a greater influx of international students since the 1994 birth of the new democracy, and have created strategic plans for future growth (477). Amongst all South African universities, Rouhani identified the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University as being forerunners in engaging with the rapidly changing nature of higher education in South Africa within the new democratic dispensation. He writes, “[These two universities’] responses are characterized by a planned, long-term, aggressive drive toward internationalization. For these institutions...internationalization is a way to become a more globally competitive or ‘world-class’ institution” (478).

But internationalization in South Africa, Rouhani notes, has not come without its challenges. He writes,

The increasing flow of international students to South Africa has brought new challenges and opportunities to its higher education institutions, which are caught between two countervailing necessities. On the one hand is the need to address the demands of institutional and systemic transformation; on the other hand is the attempt to come to grips with the pressures of internationalization (481).

Being an international student at UCT myself, I have observed these challenges first-hand. The South Africans with whom I have taken my courses, many of whom are lecturers at nearby universities, are well aware of the educational changes demanded by the national drive towards transformation in the post-apartheid era. This is a task which they take

seriously, however daunting it may appear. Therefore, to redirect resources away from national concerns and towards increasing a university's reputation abroad or to pursue a programme of internationalization for economic reasons is potentially problematic, stressing resources that are often already attenuated.

Rouhani observes that with the introduction of the new democracy in 1994 there followed a dramatic increase in the number of international students seeking to study in South Africa (471). The number has risen from an estimated 4,600 visiting international students in 1992 to approximately 53,000 in 2007 (472). He notes, "Because of this rapid growth, South Africa is now the top host nation to international students on the African continent and among the top twenty host countries in the world" (472).

Nevertheless, many students from other continents continue to choose locations other than Africa as the desired study-abroad destination. For example, study-abroad programmes in the United States which sponsor study locations in Africa attract only 3% of all American students who study abroad each year (Metzler, 2002:50). Pires (2000) discusses the myriad reasons why this may be the case. These include unfamiliarity with the continent, travel costs, and political and economic instability, whether perceived or actual (40). When students and parents consider an overseas locale for study-abroad, he notes, they often picture Rome or Paris as the destination of choice, not Africa (40). Although globalization can "bring the world to one's doorstep," perhaps it is also guilty of too easily reinforcing old stereotypes and prejudices.

Be that as it may, South African universities are attracting an increasing number of students who hope to study-abroad within its borders, as Rouhani noted above. And regardless of the popular conception of the African continent in the West, Pires asserts that there are numerous lessons to be learned by studying at an African university, such as learning about other cultures, about oneself, and about one's culture from the perspective of another culture (41). He writes, "...students who actively and conscientiously participate in these programs reap the benefits of greater self-awareness, intercultural understanding, and international experience" (2000:44). The potential for gaining this knowledge may be all the more powerful precisely because of the prevailing stereotypical views of the continent.

My interest in this research is driven in part by a curiosity about those few who *do* decide to study in Africa. As an international student myself, I have had to personally navigate the various new and unfamiliar practices present at UCT and in South Africa. I have experienced the disjuncture of being unable to successfully draw upon past practices or capital in new settings: at times I have felt literally illiterate in the requisite ways of speaking,

doing, and valuing. For example, the ways in which language was used in the classroom by lecturers and classmates – both word choice as well as accent – often had me guessing as to the intended meaning. I found it fascinating – and at times frustrating and entertaining, too – that sharing a common language did not guarantee the comprehension of what was said. Thus, I am motivated to better understand the factors which influenced my journey and that of others who also choose to sojourn abroad for a period of time.

Of course it must be pointed out that Africa is a massive continent, its diversity often underappreciated in the wider world. A study-abroad programme in South Africa likely looks different from one in, say, Uganda. In addition, it may be argued that the city of Cape Town is hardly representative of the metropolises of the continent. Be that as it may, this city and its university have been the context of my – and my interviewees’ – study-abroad experiences. It is as good a place to begin as any.

Internationalization and study-abroad programmes at the University of Cape Town

As documented by Rouhani (2007) above, the University of Cape Town (UCT) is an eager participant, and even a leader, in developing its academic reputation on the international stage. This is clearly evident in the most recent International Academic Programmes Office Annual Report (2005), available on the university’s website (<http://www.uct.ac.za/about/iapo/overview/reports/>). The Report states, “IAPO’s vision is to make UCT sought after as Africa’s ‘international’ university” (1). The document continues with an explication of this vision:

To be a ‘world-class’ university UCT must interact in the global arena. This interaction is required in all facets of the university’s activities: teaching, curricula, research, administration, student recruitment, staff development, service provision, fund-raising, marketing, etc.... it is the function of IAPO to facilitate and develop internationalization at UCT (1).

It is clear from this statement that the University considers a strategic response to internationalization an institutional imperative, not only as a means of developing its programmes, students, and staff, but also as a way to grow its reputation on the international stage.

Neither is this report merely spouting empty rhetoric. It notes that international students now constitute 20% of an entire student population of just over 20,000 students (see Appendices D and E). Since its inception in 1996, the number of international students studying at UCT, either for one semester (semester study-abroad, or SSA) or for an entire degree (international full-degree students, or IFDS) has increased exponentially. IAPO has

followed suit: the office opened in 1996 with three full-time staff members; by 2006 there were twenty-three individuals in its employ. Likewise, during that time the number of international students at UCT jumped from 1,630 in 1997 to over 4,300 in 2006.² In fact, such growth has begun to stretch the limits of IAPO's capacities and has forced the university to restrict the number of international applicants they are able to accept each year (IAPO Annual Report, 2005).

Considering the growth of globalization, the effects of internationalization on universities and the continual increase of cross-border academic activity, this is an important moment to learn about the study-abroad experience from the international students themselves. If the emphasis upon global citizenship and cross-cultural competence continues in its present course, as it appears set to do, there appears to be no better time to explore what is happening for students, on the ground and in real time, as they study and live abroad.

Moreover, as this academic sojourn is very much taken up in the social realities of the world, where power and resources for practice may be arbitrarily recognized and utilized, a sociocultural approach has been chosen for this research. It may open up for us a small window into how international students navigate the social and academic practices they encounter at a university in South Africa.

Researcher as international full-degree student

My personal experience as an international full-degree student at UCT serves as one of the catalysts driving my interest in this topic. The international student experience has been *my* experience, and it has not been without its challenges. My own encounters with new social and academic practices has caused me to become interested in how other students manage this demanding task, as well.

In addition, my nationality and future career goals also influence my interest in this topic. I am citizen of the United States, and hope to one day serve as an upper-level administrator at a university in that country, with a special interest in study-abroad programmes. Thus, my research focus is primarily, although not exclusively, upon the navigation experiences of American students.

The presence of my subjective experiences are unavoidable even as I undertake to explore the experiences of others. In particular, I am aware that my identity as an American interviewer likely played a role in my relationship with each student participant, influencing

² <http://www.uct.ac.za/about/iapo/overview/highlights/>, <http://www.uct.ac.za/about/iapo/overview/statistics/>.

what they decided to share in the interview. For example, some of the American students likely felt more at liberty to share their opinions precisely because they were speaking to a fellow American. Had I been South African, I imagine some of their answers would have been shaped rather differently. An unavoidable part of my research design, I have sought to keep this reality in mind throughout data analysis.

The geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century provide a powerful impetus to undertake a study of this kind. It is imperative to understand qualitatively the student experience of studying and living overseas in a world where a student can depart New York or Copenhagen one day and arrive in Cape Town the next. This research, it is hoped, will contribute to filling the gap in our qualitative understanding of this experience.

The theoretical framework for the present study is rooted in sociocultural approaches. This approach appears to be rather novel in the field of international education, which has been dominated by quantitative research and other forms of qualitative exploration. This topic will be explored further in the following chapter. By approaching the topic from an epistemology rooted in sociocultural theories, I hope to provide a novel set of lenses for understanding the international student's navigational processes. Based on the findings of this project I will suggest how students may be better equipped to navigate the practices which they may encounter on their study-abroad journey.

Chapter 2: Review of literature: empirical and theoretical frames

The aim of this chapter is to provide a review of two sets of literature which are relevant to this project. First, it will begin with a review of the empirical literature from the field of international education, specifically focusing upon study-abroad programmes research which serves as the context in which my research takes place. This discussion will suggest a gap in the qualitative field of research to which the current project may contribute. I will then explore the theoretical literature which provides the epistemological framework for this thesis. The selected theories will be defined and explored, and their use in this project delineated. Finally, the third section will delimit the key terms of the research question³, discuss the rationale for the choice of each term and show how they serve to focus and strengthen the research question.

Empirical literature review

Although the first study-abroad organizations were established early in the 20th century (e.g. the Institute of International Education in the United States, 1919; the German Academic Exchange Service, 1925), substantial growth in the field did not get underway until the latter part of the century (Altbach and Teichler, 2001:9). Today, however, various organizations exist which not only sponsor international study-abroad opportunities for students and faculty but also conduct quantitative and qualitative research in the field. Organizations such as the Institute of International Education (www.iie.org), the Council on International Educational Exchange (www.ciee.org), the Forum on Education Abroad (www.forumea.org), and the Boston College Center for International Higher Education (www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/) are now key players in the field of international education, several of them sponsoring journals dedicated to the field.

However, while there may appear to be a range of resources available to the researcher, several difficulties remain which make the location of related empirical research a significant challenge.

In 2007, Kehm and Teichler published a review of the development of research in the domain of international education from the mid-1990's to 2006 (461). In it they noted the plethora of obstacles which impede the work of the researcher. They remarked, "Any attempt to gather information on the state of systematic knowledge with regard to the international

³ "How do international students navigate the social and academic practices of a South African university?"

dimensions of higher education is hampered by the fact that research in this domain is not easily accessible” (261). They note several barriers to the researcher who hopes to make a survey of literature in the field. First, this area of research has become more diverse as new themes related to internationalization and higher education have multiplied, spreading the research more broadly across many domains and disciplines. In addition, many reports are not published in journals widely available to the researcher. Lastly, the authors believe there to exist numerous studies which have been published in languages other than English, posing a challenge to the mono-lingual (461).

To compound the difficulties discussed above, Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005) report that although the literature on international education is plentiful, most of the research has been focused on theoretical and conceptual approaches within the field (54). The number of studies which are explicitly empirical remain relatively few. Moreover, and more directly relevant to this thesis, Dolby (2007) has noted the lack of work focused specifically upon study-abroad programmes and the students who participate in them (143).

Van Hoof and Verbeeten also highlight the need for more quantitative and qualitative studies in order to test widely-held assumptions regarding the benefits of study-abroad. They write, “It is no longer sufficient for educators to say that the international study experience is invaluable and necessary in the education of our students because they think it is so. These opinions have to be backed up with hard facts, and we have to move away from mere anecdotal evidence” (54).

As stated in the previous chapter, this research is interested in the manner in which international students navigate new social spaces. The steady growth of these programmes, while perhaps structured to take advantage of shifting economies and national borders, may unwittingly communicate that such experiences are, without argument, vital for further personal and intellectual growth, and tacitly assume that they will always offer positive experiences for the participant. However, as Van Hoof and Verbeeten noted above, such assumptions must be supported by actual research; easy platitudes or tacit ideologies do not suffice.

Van Hoof and Verbeeten continue, “It is important for the study of international education to start analyzing the perceptions of the students involved in such programs, not only to corroborate predominant ideas about the benefits and challenges of international education but also for purely practical reasons” (54), such as to learn whether accommodation arrangements were adequate. This thesis serves as a further step towards providing the kind

of research needed to interrogate assumptions regarding the benefits of study-abroad programmes, and the policies which support them.

Nevertheless, a few published studies have been located as well as a number of dissertations which focus on the student experience of study-abroad programmes. The discussion below will a) explore three published studies which offer insight to the present research, and b) provide a brief survey of a number of unpublished postgraduate dissertations whose work is related to the present project.

Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005), conducting research at Northern Arizona University in the U.S., explored the opinions of students who participated in study-abroad programmes sponsored by that university. Their research focused both on outgoing American students as well as incoming foreign students coming to study at the university for a period of time. A number of their findings are related to the present research. First, although most respondents reported that they felt the experience was relevant to their lives, both groups linked its relevance more strongly to personal development rather than to their academic careers.

Second, the authors queried respondents about what they regarded as the major benefits of studying abroad. They write,

By far the most common comments were that it had brought them a great understanding of other cultures, that it had helped them appreciate their own culture more, that it enabled them to learn more about themselves, and that it had enriched them personally (56).

Although confirming that students face many challenges when studying and living overseas, "...they are, in many ways, not negatives at all and valuable to the development of the student, both personally and academically" (56). As will be discussed in chapter 4, the manner in which participants represented their experiences was influenced by the challenges they faced and by what they felt to be the personal benefits of studying abroad.

In the second study, McNamee and Faulkner (2001) focused upon the social experiences of American professor exchanges with institutions abroad. Although the subjects of their research were lecturers, a number of conclusions are relevant to this thesis. The authors set out to examine the ways in which the overseas academic experience causes disruptions to how the participants make meaning in their lives. Meaning is often "socially constructed" and provides both a sense of direction to a person's life as well as a framework for making sense of life experiences (64). Events which contradict one's taken-for-granted beliefs are a challenge which must be made sense of. The authors write, "...what gives a person a sense of meaning in life in a general way may normally be taken for granted except

when disrupted. Fundamental disruption to a person's source of life meaning may provoke a meaning or existential crisis" (65).

McNamee and Faulkner conclude that an appropriate balance must be found in the course of making sense of such an experience. They write, "In other words, too little meaning disruption is likely to result in little or no personal or professional growth. Too much meaning disruption, on the other hand, may be debilitating and interfere with the quality of the experience" (76).

The authors also found that proactively learning about the various social, cultural, political, and academic norms and practices of the host country may be helpful in smoothing the participant's adjustment upon arrival (75). Thinking about how social and academic practices may be different can also help the participant to prepare for the disorientation they may encounter in the overseas setting.

A number of conclusions in McNamee and Faulkner's study are of particular relevance to the present research. In particular, their focus upon how the individual is active in meaning-making in and between social spaces is similar to the sociocultural perspective taken in this thesis. The overseas sojourner often faces personal crises and must make new meanings and adopt new social practices in order to manage them. This aspect of their research parallels my interest in the "critical moments" [see discussion on Giddens' concept, chapter 3] or disjunctures which arise in such experiences.

The third study, by Dolby (2007), takes a distinctly different approach. Rather than focus on how students' perspectives may have become more global due to study-abroad, she focused on "...how they negotiate their national American identity" (142). She writes that this is in fact an important component of students' experiences of study-abroad and deserves more attention than it is usually given.

Dolby begins by noting how the concept of "nation" is an artificial construct created and nurtured through various social practices (144). Although beneath the concept there often exist contradictions and contested notions around what it means to be a member of a nation, it remains "...an affective space of identification, which must constantly be renewed and reaffirmed in order to survive" (145). Thus, the concept of "nation" cannot be understood as a fixed concept; rather, its meaning and personal and social significance shift as global, national, and personal contexts change over time. "Despite the above contradictions and challenges," Dolby writes, "this destabilization of nation has not weakened its power to shape American identities but has instead created a space in which the taken-for-granted

assumptions about the unity, singularity, and solidity of nation and national identity are questioned” (145).

Dolby points out that the concept of nation endures in its power to create social solidarity. Quoting Calhoun, she writes,

To treat nationalism as a relic of an earlier order, a sort of irrational expression, or a kind of moral mistake is to fail to see both the continuing power of nationalism as a discursive formation and the work – sometimes positive – that nationalist solidarities continue to do in the world. As a result, nationalism is not easily abandoned, even if its myths, contents, and excesses are easily debunked (145).

Dolby notes that international sojourners are not given only one of two options to which they must align themselves: an unquestioning allegiance to nation on the one hand or a “vague cosmopolitanism” on the other (146). Rather, she found that individuals reject such a dualism and are constantly remaking their identity in terms of their relationship to their nation (146).

A number of Dolby’s results provide an important context for the questions driving the present study. In her research, Dolby queried fifty American students about what they had learned about themselves as Americans, about their nation, and about the host culture during their semester abroad (147). She found that the geopolitical realities of the world, in particular the involvement of the United States in the war in Iraq, shaped the majority of the students’ experiences abroad. She noted that many students were aware of American stereotypes and sought to distance themselves from being the typical “bad” American (148). Dolby noted, “Students actively constructed and strove to personify this good American, who is respectful of other cultures and people, open-minded, and willing to be critical of the United States’ role in the world” (151). She noted that students sought to be sensitive to what those in the host country expressed about America and its involvement in the war, and therefore were careful not to take a strongly patriotic stance.

However, Dolby found that rather than articulating their identities in terms of “global citizenship,” a persona often proclaimed as a sure result of studying overseas, students maintained their sense of self as an American who was a visitor to another nation (151). Dolby found that students “...are invested in understanding their identity within a national (in this case, U.S.) paradigm but one that is more reflective and self-conscious and moves away from the narrow, ethnocentric, exclusive ideas of nation that are commonly associated with the United States” (151).

Dolby’s research in this area has suggested that study-abroad programmes cannot dismiss issues related to national identities, nor choose to focus solely upon developing

“global” citizens (152). She writes, “Whereas global awareness is vague, contested, and perhaps can only be achieved through multiple, extended sojourns abroad, the goal of critical reflection on U.S. national identity is considerably more achievable” (152). Her research suggests that it is essential for students to consider questions related to nation, patriotism, personal national identity, and the geopolitical realities of the world, not only before embarking for the host nation but throughout the experience as well as after they have returned home.

Dolby’s research provides a unique perspective on how students negotiate the study-abroad experience. Her study is of particular relevance to this project, and not just because its focus is primarily upon American students. Her research offers special insight into how the students interviewed for this thesis represented their practices in terms of national identity.

At this juncture one could continue with a review of the myriad dissertations and theses written on the subject of international education in general, and on study-abroad programmes in particular. Research topics in this field are many and include the following: intercultural learning, global-awareness, intellectual development, self-identity, and attitudes to diversity, to name a few. However, as a fuller review of all available literature is constrained by limitations of time and space, a representative sample of studies related to my research will be briefly discussed, including a closer look at two related theses recently completed at the University of Cape Town.

All of the theses discussed below have been selected for particular aspects of their research which are related to the aims of the present thesis. These points of similarity will become more evident in chapters 4 and 5, where the interview data will be explored in depth. All of the theses below were completed at American universities.

Domville-Roach’s (2007) study of the expectations and experiences of students on study abroad programmes found that building relationships with local students, learning about the host culture, and personal growth were significant goals of student participants. Paola’s study (2005), which focused on the experience of students studying abroad in South Africa, identified several factors which influenced students’ decisions to study in South Africa. These included prior coursework at the home institution in African studies, the expectation of opportunities for personal enjoyment and cultural learning, and the existence of courses taught in English. Similarly, the aim of this thesis is to explore how students move in and out of new social spaces, which naturally is linked to their motivations for doing so. I am interested in how this aids them as sense-making navigators.

Forgues (2005) found that the study-abroad experience had a significant impact upon student's openness to diversity and intercultural sensitivity. In a qualitative study of study-abroad programmes, Shougee (1999) discovered that students experience and view "culture shock" not as an obstruction to be overcome but as an opportunity for personal growth. Bryan (2005) sought to discover how studying abroad influenced white American students' perspectives on racial identity. His study revealed that such experiences often catalyzed change in how white students viewed their whiteness and helped them view racial identity in new ways. Likewise, this thesis touches on issues related to diversity, difference, and national and racial identity, and how these influence the ways in which my international interviewees negotiated unfamiliar practices.

Two theses completed at the University of Cape Town have some relevance to the present research. First, Atkins (2002) explored the experiences of international students at three universities in the Western Cape. She sought to discover how these students felt about their social and academic experiences and any problems they faced in adapting to South African culture. She found that many students had difficulties in adjusting to social life in South Africa, but in general were satisfied with their educational experiences. The second thesis, by Baker (2007), examined the process of internationalization at the University of Cape Town and how it influenced the role of the International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO). She provides an interesting history of the office's development as the university increased its focus upon internationalization after the establishment of the new democracy in 1994. She found that the manner in which IAPO was expected to manage international programmes required more comprehensive institutional support in order for it to be more effective in fulfilling its duties.

Although these two studies were completed in the same region as this thesis and examined issues related to international education, the present work contributes in ways that are distinct from each of them. While Atkins focused on international students from other African countries, my focus is primarily concerned with the experiences of American study-abroad students at UCT. And although American students are prominent in Baker's work, they do not play a central role, nor were any of them actually interviewed: data on the American student experience at UCT was gathered by means of "informal interviews" and "participant observation" (54).

A gap in the empirical field of research

Some efforts have been made to explore the international student experience, in South Africa and elsewhere. However, there appears to remain considerable room for further research that is close-up, fine-grained and qualitative, and which interrogates what is actually happening for the student *on the ground* and *in the field* as s/he navigates the study-abroad experience. Most U.S.-based research on this topic is conducted only after the student has returned to his/her home university from the study-abroad location. In contrast, the research for the present project has taken place on site: participants were interviewed prior to their return to their home university.

Additionally, whereas many studies utilize quantitative methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, this thesis draws upon sociocultural theories as an epistemological framework for its work. The present work strives to do just that. The theoretical framework for this thesis is rooted in the work of two social theorists who were concerned with how subjective beings move in and between objective social spaces, and with the arbitrary distribution and use of power in those interactions. James Gee, a sociolinguist, and Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist, have been chosen to provide the epistemological grounds for this study and offer a uniquely sociocultural approach to the experiences of students studying abroad. Their contributions to the study will be explored in detail below.

It is hoped that by adopting this approach in place of surveys or other quantitative methods, we will gain a small glimpse into the ways that students experience studying and living overseas. While there is certainly an important place for studies such as those discussed above, the present research aims to offer a distinctive contribution both to the empirical field of study-abroad programmes and to the theoretical field of social theory within higher education.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The work of James Gee and Pierre Bourdieu provides the epistemological lens for this research. Sociolinguist and sociologist respectively, much of the work of these theorists addresses the differential distribution of power in the social world, the ideologies that drive this process, and the implications for social practice. It is my aim in this project to draw upon the work of these scholars in order to explore the ontological experiences of international students as they encounter and navigate the social and academic practices of a South African university. The discussion below will outline Gee's concept of Discourses and explore Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital. Their theoretical frameworks are complementary and provide a useful set of sociocultural theories for the project at hand.

James Gee and Discourses

Working from the perspective of sociolinguistics, Gee introduces a sociocultural approach to language and literacy and seeks to develop a way of analyzing how language functions in society, particularly in educational institutions (2003: vii). Becoming “literate” within various social interactions is vital to gaining legitimate membership and power in the social field. To help make sense of how language and literacy function in the social world, Gee suggests the concept of Discourse, with a capital “D,” a concept which will be explored momentarily.

Gee emphasizes the importance of making implicit ideologies explicit, to deliberately consider what creates the basis for belief and action and the fair distribution of goods in society (21). He writes,

Ideologies are important because since theories ground beliefs, and beliefs lead to actions, and actions create social worlds (‘reality’), ideologies simultaneously explain, often exonerate, and always partially create, in interaction with history and the material bases of society, the distribution of goods (21).

Tacit theories of life often cause harm to others because they provide assumed and taken-for-granted explanations, or ideologies, of how the world works. As a sociolinguist, the primary targets of Gee’s theory are the powerful ideologies which surround the concept of *literacy*.

Gee writes that literacy is usually viewed as an autonomous personal ability that “...leads to higher order cognitive skills” (54). This ideology regards literacy as a skill set which exists apart from any particular context and which naturally leads towards upward mobility and self-empowerment. However, according to the New Literacy Studies, a movement into which Gee is considered a forerunner, this view is not an honest one. New Literacy Studies has sought to confront the longstanding view of literacy as a historical force which is autonomous in its effects as well as an attribute which inevitably leads to social progress (Collins, 1995:80; Stephens, 2000:10). Street (1993) calls this the *autonomous model* of literacy. According to the autonomous model, literacy is treated as “...independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character” (Street, 1993:5). In fact, Carrington and Luke assert that the unquestioned, positive social consequences of literacy have “...become one of the enduring myths of the Western world...” (Carrington and Luke, 1997:97).

As an alternative to the autonomous model, Street proposes the *ideological model*, a view of literacy which acknowledges the link between literacy and societal power structures

and which recognizes "...the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts" (1993:7). Street explains that this model is termed "ideological" because those who subscribe to it readily acknowledge the existence of multiple *literacies* and the *ideological* nature of literacy practices. Ahearn (2001) writes, "It is important to understand literacy as a form of social practice...and to investigate the way it interacts with ideologies and institutions to shape and define the possibilities and life paths of individuals" (128). In short, literacy is enacted in multiple ways and in various social contexts, and has to do with ontology and epistemology; it is not a neutral practice.

Like Street and others of the New Literacy Studies, Gee concurs that literacy is not an uncontested term, nor one that is easily defined. For language is not one monolithic thing which is easily understood; it is bound up with its various sociocultural contexts and is made up of many 'sub-languages' (2003:66). To compound matters, the same words may mean different things to different people which often leads to misunderstanding or miscommunication (74). This requires a series of guesses on the part of hearers as to the meaning of words, guesses which are often conventionalized, unconscious, and habitual (77).

However, the fact of the matter is that we cannot always be actively or consciously engaged in this work of meaning-making, for it requires time and energy. Thus we depend upon the cultural models of the social institutions in which we participate to do this work for us (77). The appropriate or accepted meanings of words are determined by the "cultural model" of the particular group of which one is a member (123). Gee and Green explain, "Cultural models are usually not stored in any one person's head but are distributed across the different sorts of 'expertise' and viewpoints found in a group" (1998:123). The cultural model becomes a resource for group members to draw on as a resource for guiding meaning-making and action (123). Thus the importance of ideologies: we make use of (often tacit) social theories and cultural models in order to help us guess at meanings, which in turn influences the practices in which we choose to engage (78). Our ideologies, based on cultural models of meaning, become enfolded in our speech and behavior in the social world.

In order to enable individuals to explicitly analyze personal theories as well as ideologies of literacy and power, Gee introduces what he calls a sociocultural approach to literacy (2003:123). This approach is his theory of *Discourses*, with a capital "D." Discourses are often fraught with unspoken and tacit theories or ideas of what it means to be a member of a particular social group and are always an integral part of ideologies. Because they are often tacit they can act as powerful social tools which separate those on the inside from those on the outside.

Gee links Discourses to literacy, stressing that Discourses are much more than merely the spoken word. Gee explains, “What is important is language plus being the ‘right’ *who* doing the ‘right’ *what*. What is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but *saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations*. These combinations I will refer to as Discourses...” (127, orig. emphasis). Gee expounds, “Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (127). Discourses are ways of enacting certain roles in order to be accepted as certain types of people (viii). As Gee states, in our use of social languages we are not “...a single *who*, but a great many, different *whos* in different contexts” (66, orig. emphasis).

It is important to remember that a social context is always required in order for one to be granted membership within any Discourse, and that the speaker/actor must be literate in the given Discourse in order for their social language to carry the intended meaning (149). Carrington and Luke write that literacy, in this sense, is a “...social construction, formed within the context of dynamic social fields and as the cumulative result of participation within a range of discourses and social relationships” (1997:98). To be literate in a Discourse requires a social context in order to accumulate and display the requisite resources for legitimate membership.

However, to be “literate” in a given Discourse does not necessarily mean that all is well, for Discourses often conflict with one another. “There are conflicts among [Discourses], and each of us lives and breathes these conflicts as we act out our various Discourses” (Gee, 2003:ix). These tensions often arise between what Gee calls the primary Discourse, acquired in the home, and secondary Discourses, which are picked up as the individual moves out of the home into various new social contexts (137). While the individual is fluent in the primary Discourse, having had it modeled since youth and acquired it over time, secondary Discourses are learned in other places, such as churches, schools, businesses, or clubs (137). These secondary Discourses often come into conflict with a person’s primary Discourse and with other secondary Discourses, and are “the site of very real struggle and resistance” (ix). In these instances the individual may learn to participate within them even if s/he does not entirely come to master them (145ff; Gee calls this “mushfaking”).

To anticipate the discussion of Bourdieu below, these conflicts occur because individuals believe – often unconsciously – that there exist important stakes in the social world, stakes to be won or lost, the outcome of which impacts one’s place within various Discourses. To use Bourdieu’s terms, one’s ability to take a meaningful social position

depends on the capital one has previously acquired and on how the habitus, most often unconsciously, draws upon that capital in order to gain power and position within the new social space.

Pierre Bourdieu and field, habitus, and capital

We hinted above to Bourdieu's contribution to our understanding of social practice. Whereas Gee provides a sociocultural lens for interpreting the social practices in which students engage, Bourdieu offers a more sociological perspective which enables us to examine the resources which influence their position within a social space.

Bourdieu believed that the common polarization between objectivism and subjectivism within sociology was a false one, unhelpful to elucidating the inner workings of social practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:3). He sought to address this bifurcation by bringing the two together into a single theory of social practice. Bourdieu, like Gee, was interested in how beings made ontological sense of the social world and how it in turn influenced them. He was interested in how the distribution and acquisition of power influenced how individuals moved in the social world.

In Bourdieu's words, all human interaction occurs within an "economy of practice" (in Carrington and Luke, 1997:100). The accumulation of social power and control underlies all social interactions within this economy, and are rooted not only in the exchange of actual currency but especially in various social practices. For Bourdieu, "...all practice thus is directed, consciously or otherwise, at the maximization of social advantage" (Carrington and Luke, 1997:100). Carrington and Luke continue, "In such a model, spoken and written textual practice forms a powerfully mediating moment where human agency and social structure, motivation and norm are realized" (1997:100). Bourdieu's economy of practice explicates what is a dialectical relationship between objective social structures and the self-interested, subjective choices of individuals.

To help make sense of the dual components of the social world – the subjective and the objective – Bourdieu proposed the concepts of field, habitus, and capital. Bourdieu and Wacquant succinctly explain, "A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:16). Capital is "an index of social power" (Carrington and Luke, 1997:101) and consists of the various resources which are accrued over time and which may be of varying worth

within a given field. These concepts are central to Bourdieu's theory of practice (1991). Each will be delineated below.

Similar to Gee's Discourses, fields vary in the types of practices subsisting within them. Also similar to Gee's work, the appropriate habitus is required in order for one to legitimately take up a position within a given field. Bourdieu and Wacquant explain,

Each field prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles. These principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:17).

However, these values are often not explicitly stated; they are inherent in the field itself and require a "sense of the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:120). Bourdieu likens a field to a game in which participants vie for power according to the unwritten rules of the field (98). Dika and Singh (2002) elaborate, "The field is characterized by the 'rules of the game,' which are neither explicit nor codified. Because the field is dynamic, valued forms of social and cultural capital are also dynamic and arbitrary" (33). Therefore, in order to move successfully in a given field the habitus must have internalized the external structures of the field – the "sense of the game" – and must also possess the capital appropriate to that field.

If field describes the objective side of the proverbial coin, habitus composes the subjective. Habitus is a "structuring mechanism" or a "set of dispositions" within the individual which influences action and causes agents to act in certain ways (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:18; Bourdieu, 1991:12). In Bourdieu's words, habitus is

...the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations... a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:18).

However, it is important to note that the habitus often operates unconsciously. Thompson writes, "The dispositions [of habitus] generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'" (Introduction to Bourdieu, 1991: 12). Webb explains,

The point is that the habitus is not found just at the level of people's thoughts (their consciousness), nor just in the language they use, though these are important dimensions of it. The habitus also works at the level of the body, shaping what might seem its instinctive responses; and it is as much unconscious as conscious (2005:115).

Both language and body are influenced, largely unconsciously, by the objective fields through which the individual has previously moved.

One's habitus is not the only prerequisite for successful practice within a particular field. To take a position in a given field, one must believe in the value of the stakes of that field. Jenkins writes, "The existence of a field *presupposes* and, in its functioning, *creates* a belief on the part of participants in the legitimacy and value of the capital which is at stake in the field" (1992:85, original emphasis). Bourdieu writes, "Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a 'contract,' that the game is worth playing" (1992:98).

Just as one must believe in the stakes of the game, one must also possess the requisite capital of the field in order to participate in it meaningfully. Bourdieu writes that,

the value of a species of capital (e.g., knowledge of Greek or of integral calculus) hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed: a species of capital is what is efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to *exist*, in the field under consideration (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:99, original emphasis).

Power is required in order to participate in the game, and in order to acquire power one must possess *capital*.

Bourdieu delineates four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In brief here but defined in detail below, economic capital is that which can be converted easily into money; cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized; social capital is comprised of social connections and membership within particular social groups; and symbolic capital, a type of capital which any of the previous forms can take and is the "...perception that *recognizes* its specific logic or, if you prefer, *misrecognizes* the arbitrariness of its possession and accumulation" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:119).

Webb (2005) explains, "The point about the various forms of capital is that they are recognized as having value and they can be traded or exchanged for desired outcomes within their own field or within others" (109-110). Thus, economic capital can be easily transformed into cash (Bourdieu, 1986:243). Cultural capital, as mentioned above, can be embodied, objectified, or institutionalized. First, cultural capital that is embodied takes the form of "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1986:243). Because this capital resides within the body its acquisition takes time and requires personal investment, usually beginning with early socialization within a family that possesses strong cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986:245-246).

Embodied cultural capital in particular is likely to be regarded as symbolic capital. As mentioned above, symbolic capital is anything which is arbitrarily recognized, or as Bourdieu

points out, misrecognized as inherently possessing value (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:119). Bourdieu writes, “Because the social conditions of [embodied cultural capital’s] transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital, it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition...” (Bourdieu, 1986:245). To utilize this form of cultural capital may provide an advantage of greater power within a given field.

The second type of cultural capital, objectified, holds value insofar as it is linked to the embodied form (Bourdieu, 1986:246). Bourdieu identifies this sort of capital as material objects, including media such as paintings, writings, sculptures, and other works of art or valuable instruments. In contemporary parlance objectified capital might include the possession of a nice car, a large home, or the latest technology.

Third, cultural capital may also be institutionalized. This type is usually in the form of academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986:247). Webb explains, “Education is an important field because of its capacity to confer capital, particularly cultural capital, upon its participants. Indeed education can be referred to as an academic market in terms of its distribution of such cultural capital” (2005:110).

Lastly, capital may exist through membership within a particular group. This form of capital, known as social capital, is the “...aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986:248). These resources can be realized in any of the other modes of capital.

The point of possessing capital is *power*: it is all-important in order to successfully establish oneself within a given field. As Webb explains,

The amount of power a person has within a field depends on that person’s position within the field, and the amount of capital she or he possesses. Of course one of the advantages of being in a position of power is that it enables groups or agents to designate what is ‘authentic’ capital (2005:23).

Possession of the “right kind” and amount of power in a given field enables the agent to “call the shots” regarding what goes for legitimate or illegitimate practice within that field.

Bourdieu makes this point clear in his *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), wherein he discusses the symbolic value of certain linguistic competences in linguistic markets:

The value of the [linguistic] utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speakers’ linguistic competences, understood both as their capacity for production and as their capacity for appropriation and

appreciation; *it depends, in other words, on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own products* (67; added emphasis).

What is true about power in this case is true of power in all fields: it is largely *symbolic* and *arbitrary*. Bourdieu writes,

Symbolic power...is a power that can be exercised only if it is recognized, that is, misrecognized as arbitrary... It is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very structure of the field in which *belief* is produced and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1991:170, orig. emphasis).

The acquisition and use of the appropriate capital, however arbitrarily valued it may be, is necessary in order to meaningfully attain power and take up a position within a given field.

Although study-abroad students remain in the field of higher education, this movement into new spaces within the field reveals new valuations of capital. Students' available capital is now valued differently, at times diminishing the power they have grown accustomed to at their home institution. These disjunctures foreground the necessity of utilizing available capital, or acquiring new capital, in order to re-position themselves within these new spaces.

In Gee's terms, study-abroad students will more than likely be confronted with both familiar and foreign sets of social practices. Whereas the student may have enjoyed membership within a number of Discourses at their home institution, in the new context those ways of speaking/acting/dressing/valuing may or may not prove salient. Some of their literacies may enable them to get along well, but at other times they find themselves literally at a loss for words (or actions). These are moments where known and unknown Discourses collide, causing disjunctures of experience and making explicit the student's resources for practice.

Delimitation of terms

In this project I am seeking to understand how international students navigate the social and academic practices of a South African university. Here I will offer a discussion of the key terms in the research question, including a rationale for why each has been chosen and how they will be used in this project. In particular, the terms *international student*, *navigate*, and *social and academic practices* will be explored and delimited.

By *international student* I mean an individual who is studying overseas but is officially registered at a university in their country of origin and who will eventually be

awarded a degree from that institution. The international student is a student who elects to take leave from their home university in order to study in another country for a period of time. All of the students participating in my project were international students studying at the University of Cape Town, most of them for one semester, a few enrolled for the entire academic year.

What do I mean by the term *navigate*? I have in mind a nautical journey in which a ship sets sail upon an as-yet uncharted watercourse. To navigate this river is to undertake a journey from one place to another. This journey is objectively limited by specific bounds and influenced by various features encountered along the way. However, the voyage also depends upon the student drawing, most often unconsciously, upon past and present experiences and resources in order keep the ship even-keeled and moving forward. On the one hand, the journey is marked by objective physical and social realities which limit and influence the ship's course. On the other hand, the subjective resources of the student navigator are also necessary for the voyage to continue forward.

Navigation, in this sense, is the movement of the subjective through the objective, the habitus through the field, the outsider encountering new and unfamiliar Discourses. The student is a sense-making navigator on this journey influenced both by past socializations via the habitus as well as membership within various Discourses back home. Obstacles along the voyage – unfamiliar social and academic practices, a lack of power in new spaces of the field – necessitate a utilization and/or acquisition of capital in order to take up a new position and be recognized as a legitimate member within those spaces.

What do I mean by the terms *social* and *academic practices*? *Practices* are the myriad ways in which humans act, exist, and position themselves in social contexts. To move within a given field – to become a member of a given Discourse – requires moving in and out of a number of specific practices. In this project, I have split academic practices as a separate domain from social practices in order to aid in the analysis of the interview data. I use academic practices to refer to those practices which occur at the university and are related specifically to issues related to curriculum, course and classroom activities, and academic support (such as library services). Social practices refer to all other sorts of social interaction outside of academia and which may take place on or off university property. Of course this division between domains of practice is artificial and untenable in real life. But it is hoped that doing so here will help clarify an understanding of the various practices which the international student encounters while studying and living abroad and elucidate how s/he goes about navigating them.

The crux of the issue is this: new practices present the student with disjunctures that are often critical to the ongoing course of the student's sojourn. That is, these practices influence the student's forward journey in real ways, exerting a significant influence upon the navigational moves the individual chooses or is able to make, however large or small they may appear. It is helpful to briefly note here the operationalizing concept I have chosen to bridge the gap between the theoretical framework and the empirical data. In order to elucidate these moments of disjuncture, I will make use of Giddens' (1991) concept of "fateful moments." Fateful moments are moments where the individual is faced with new challenges and possibilities which require life-influencing decisions (1991:131). In this paper I will follow Thomson et al. (2002), who utilize Giddens' theory but alter his term from "fateful moments" to "critical moments." A more detailed presentation of this concept and its use in this thesis will be provided in Chapter 3.

Both Gee and Bourdieu are interested in social practices, in what counts as success in the possession and use of social power as individuals move in and through social spaces. The concept of navigation denotes a movement forward into these new spaces, a movement that depends upon often-tacit guidance from the habitus and upon the economic, cultural, and social capital that s/he has accrued over time. Likewise, the various Discourses in which the student has previously acquired literacy serve as resources for negotiating new Discourses in which s/he may or may not be fluent. Critical moments arise as the student encounters continuities and disjunctures in his/her study-abroad journey, moments which influence navigational choices and practices along the way.

Chapter 3: Research design and process

Methods

I have chosen to utilize a qualitative research design in order to conduct this project. According to Maxwell, the strengths of qualitative research methods lie in their primary (but not exclusive) use of an inductive approach to the data and their emphasis upon people and words rather than numbers (1996:17). The differences between quantitative and qualitative methods are many, varying widely from purposes and research questions to conceptual frameworks and the use of different research methods. Whereas quantitative research seeks to categorize variables and establish causation, qualitative research deals with data that is by nature textual, emphasizing the identification of meaning and process in context (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003:249). Seeking a paradigm that aligned with my purposes, conceptual framework, and research question, qualitative methods are well suited to my chosen epistemological concepts and align well with the exploratory and interpretive nature of my research aims. Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain,

Qualitative research is not looking for principles that are true all the time and in all conditions, like laws of physics; rather, the goal is to gain understanding of specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world. [...] The underlying assumption is that if you cannot understand something in the specific first, you cannot understand in the general later (38-39).

Qualitative research provides a useful approach to understanding the meaning of particular encounters that participants' have within specific contexts.

However, to explore these practices is not a matter of simple experimentation. Riessman observes, "Investigators do not have direct access to another's experience. We deal with ambiguous representations of it – talk, text, interaction, and interpretation" (Reissman, 1993:8). The primary window into the study-abroad experiences of participants' is through their subjective *representations* of their practices. Therefore, in order to explore these representations, I have chosen qualitative interviewing as my primary method of exploration.

Regarding this method Rubin and Rubin (1995) write, "Qualitative interviewing is both an academic and a practical tool. It allows us to share the world of others to find out what is going on, why people do what they do, and how they understand their worlds" (5). I believe this method serves as a useful tool in my endeavor to understand the *what* and the *how* of international students' navigational practices. Additionally, as I hoped to elicit responses to specific questions about the interviewee's experience, I conducted the interviews

in a semi-structured manner (Rubin and Rubin, 1995:5). Semi-structured interviews are “...designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance...” (Wengraf, 2002:5) but which also allow for unplanned questions to be asked which may fit the context and flow of the interview as it progresses (see Appendix C).

Of course the chosen methods required the use of interpretation throughout the process: even the transcription of an interview is an interpretative act. Therefore, I approached the interviews and the data from an interpretivist paradigm. This perspective fits well with my questions and aims, for it

...recognizes that meaning emerges through interaction and is not standardized from place to place or person to person. The interpretive approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the overall text of a conversation and, more broadly, the importance of seeing meaning in context (Rubin and Rubin, 1995:31).

These approaches – the interpretivist paradigm and the qualitative interview method – were chosen in order to aid my investigation into how international students navigated the social and academic practices they encountered while living and studying at the University of Cape Town.

Research process

The first step in the research process was to choose my sample. The faculty of Humanities served as the site from which my interviewees were drawn. More specifically, the students who participated in this research were drawn from two particular courses and through a study-abroad organization at UCT. These three sources permitted me to approach their students with a description of my project and a request for volunteers to participate via a face-to-face interview.

My sampling was purposive in order to align with the primary focus of the study. As mentioned in Chapter 1, my primary interest is in the experiences of American students who study abroad for two semesters or less. Hence, the majority of my sample were students from the United States. Group 1 is composed of nine students from the U.S. who were categorized by IAPO as semester study abroad (SSA) students. These students were in their third year of undergraduate studies in the Humanities and consisted of seven females and two males. This difference in gender reflects the growing trend in the United States in which more females than males choose to study abroad (Booker, 2001).

For purposes of validation and comparison, I identified and categorized a second group of international students. Group 2 is composed of four students from nations other than

the United States. Three of them are postgraduate fourth-year students; one of them is studying for the Master's degree. All of them are studying in the Humanities faculty at UCT for one year, and all of them are female. These students are from Denmark, Germany, and Zambia. The interview data collected from both groups will be analyzed together in Chapter 4, with a discussion of notable differences presented in Chapter 5.

In addition to the above attributes, the ways in which each student represented his/her navigation of the social and academic practices at UCT was no doubt influenced by gender, age, level and course of study, and national and racial identity. These are factors of which I was cognizant during analysis but which are outside the scope of this study. However, their impact upon students' study-abroad experiences deserves further attention from interested researchers and programme leaders.

A flexible interpretive movement was built into the research design to aid in the organization and analysis of the interview data. I sought to review the interviews in an iterative fashion; as I continued through the analysis of each interview I noted what appeared to be critical moments in the students' experiences. The further I got into the data the more I began to notice similarities with interviews already analyzed; I then returned to those with new ideas for critical moments suggested by the later interviews. In this way, a number of practices arose which I was able to cluster around the twin categories of social and academic practices, discussed in the previous chapter. Once the initial split was made, I was then able to look more closely at the practices within each category and identify themes which dealt more specifically with certain types of social or academic practices respectively. The artificial line drawn between these two domains of practice was designed to enable a more fine-grained look at the various practices which caused disjunctures and how students navigated them.

It is important to note my own subjectivity as an interviewer and researcher, as has been done in Chapter 1. As a white male from the United States, my race, gender and nationality no doubt influenced my perceptions and analysis throughout this project, and how my interviewees reacted to me. I have sought to be aware of these influences during analysis.

A number of issues were carefully considered in order to ensure the integrity and ethics of my research design. That I was asking students about their personal experiences required special care throughout the duration of the research process. I sought to treat each interviewee with the utmost respect, communicating my appreciation to them for their willingness to participate and deferring to their desires regarding the nature of their participation, including any information they chose not to divulge. Likewise, during

transcription and analysis of the data I sought to show respect to each interviewee by giving careful attention to the context of their statements as well as tone of voice.

At the time of each interview I presented the student with a document (see Appendix B) outlining the purpose of my research and their rights as a voluntary participant. I offered to create a pseudonym for the student if s/he desired or, if they gave me permission to use their given name, I communicated that I would use only their first name in my research. None of the students felt strongly about creating a pseudonym; thus, I have used only the participants' first names throughout the thesis. The ethics document also explained that I would update the interviewee on my progress as the research process commenced, which I have done via electronic mail. Lastly, the document requested the signature of each participant, the giving of which certified that I had permission to use the interview materials in my thesis. I obtained signatures from all participants.

It was important to choose an environment that was comfortable for participants and conducive for interviewing. Towards that end, I chose to conduct each interview at an on-campus coffeeshop or at a nearby café, whichever location was most convenient for the student. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was tape-recorded. The students appeared comfortable with this situation and did not express discomfort either with the setting or the tape-recording.

Data analysis

I have drawn upon Giddens' concept of "fateful moments" (1991) in order to operationalize the domain of epistemological concepts discussed above. Following Thomson (2002), I have altered my use of the phrase to "critical moments." These critical moments are instances where the student finds him/herself in a moment of disjuncture, a place where s/he confronts a Discourse that is unfamiliar, a place where there is a mismatch between his/her habitus and the new space in the social field. It is at this moment that the capital which the student possesses or lacks may become clear. A careful use of this concept would enable me to operationalize my research question.

Giddens writes that in the modern age the self has become a "reflexive project" (1991:32). The contemporary world poses challenges to the self-identity of the individual in ways not experienced in previous eras. Because the "post-traditional order" is one where risk and uncertainty are the norm, the individual may encounter "...many unsought-after events which may puncture the protective mantle of ontological security and cause alarm" (131).

These are fateful moments, moments where the individual "...is likely to recognize that she is faced with an altered set of risks and possibilities" (131).

It is important to note that fateful moments do not just "happen to" individuals; they can also be chosen. Giddens writes, "Institutionalized risk environments, and other more individualized risk activities, provide a major category of settings in which fatefulness is actively created" (1991:132). In choosing to study abroad, students are stepping away from familiarity and into what might be considered "risk activities": a whole set of new experiences which may challenge the student in any number of ways.

Because fateful moments have critical consequences, the individual may feel at a crossroads and may choose one of two responses: s/he may retreat to traditional beliefs and familiar authorities, or s/he may see an opportunity for empowerment and for learning new skills (1991:142). Giddens writes that because the threats of a fateful moment force the individual to take a new perspective on life, "... it is not surprising that endeavours at reskilling are likely to be particularly important and intensely pursued" (143). The empowerment and "reskilling" catalyzed by these moments have consequences for the future journey of the individual. This "reskilling" may be described, in Gee's terms, as the move to identify and adopt the requisite ways of acting/speaking/valuing of new Discourses or, in Bourdieu's terms, to utilize or acquire capital for repositioning the self in new social spaces.

In my use of the concept I have followed Thomson et al. (2002) in altering the term from "fateful moments" to "critical moments." Thomson and colleagues define a "critical moment" as "...an event described in an interview that either the researcher or the interviewee sees as having important consequences for their lives and identities" (339). Thomson notes that whereas Giddens' "fateful moment" lies within the theoretical domain, a "critical moment" is a descriptive concept (339) and is drawn from a narrative as "...the pivot, or 'complication,' on which a narrative structure turns" (339). They used the concept in a study to analyze the critical moments present in the narratives of young people (335).

I have found Thomson's alteration and use of Giddens' concept to be helpful for my own thesis, particularly as the goals of my study – to understand those moments which were critical in my interviewee's international sojourns – has some parallels to hers. Thomson's "critical moments" provided a guide for drawing out those instances during analysis of the interview data. Besides Thomson's changes, I have made two additional alterations to Giddens' concept which I believe provide a sharper operationalizing tool for my research. First, a critical moment need not necessarily come about in a single instant of time. It may also occur in an evolutionary way, where the practice in question is drawn out over a period

of time. However, the duration of time in which a critical moment occurs is not as important as the fact that it is *critical* in its impact upon the student's sense-making choices in how s/he navigates the various social and academic practices encountered.

Second, in Giddens' usage, "fateful moments" are moments which clearly have important life-long consequences for the individual. While this may be true for some of my informants, I also wanted to allow for smaller, yet no less important, moments to arise from the data. I wanted to examine not only what might be considered a "life-changing" cross-roads experience but also those moments which may be of a smaller scale.

The concept of a *critical moment* links well with the idea of *navigation*, a concept discussed in Chapter 2. The student's study-abroad journey may include critical moments where s/he encounters unfamiliar practices that act as obstacles to forward progress, such as patches of rough water or sharp bends in the river do for a ship. In Gee's terms, a critical moment foregrounds the student's "illiteracy" in any number of new Discourses and necessitates a response. In Bourdieu's terms, critical moments are moments where the student's relative power and position in the field are foregrounded. This concept was chosen to aid in the identification and interpretation of these moments of incongruity, and to bridge the gap between my chosen theoretical framework and the subjective representations of the student interviewees.

Chapter 4: Analyzing navigation and practices

Introduction

How do international students navigate the social and academic practices of a South African university? What resources of practice do they draw on in order to do this?

The discussion below will present a selection of moments which arose in interview analysis as appearing critical to the student's experience. Analysis of critical moments within the domains of social and academic practices have been clustered according to theme and will be discussed separately, as outlined in Chapter 3. I have selected comments and thoughts from the interviewees based on their ease of comprehension and representativeness of the data as a whole. As the primary focus of this study is upon American students, this group will be featured prominently in the forthcoming discussion. In Chapter 5 I will briefly examine the data in terms of the two groups of interviewees as delineated in the previous chapter. I have identified interviewees by first name only in keeping with the ethics component of the research design.

Social practices

Critical moments in regards to social practices clustered primarily around two themes. The first was in regards to how interviewees represented their socializing practices. Does the student seek out others of the same nationality – those who share similar Discourses and cultural models – or does s/he aim to befriend students from other countries? How did known Discourses and/or recognition of altered valuation of their capital influence how students navigated these moments?

The second theme, strongly linked to the first but distinct from it, was related to the student's sense of national and racial⁴ identity. For some, this was the first time that their self-concept in relation to national citizenship and/or racial background had been challenged: these had been a taken-for-granted part of their identity. How would they navigate new challenges to tacitly-held assumptions?

With whom to socialize

⁴ I use the terms "black" and "white" in order to indicate students' racial backgrounds. These terms are by no means the best choices: they are, like the concepts of "nation," "race," and "culture," highly contested terms. However, I have chosen to use them for two reasons: first, they are the terms used by my interviewees themselves, and second, one must eventually settle on some kind of terminology if the larger discussion is to move forward.

Most of the interviewees represented strong feelings about with whom to spend their social energies. For the most part, American students studying at UCT were explicit in their intent to distance themselves from their compatriots and to meet the local student population. Many of them stated that one of their primary reasons for studying abroad was a desire for new and different experiences, not only academically but socially as well. Operating beneath this desire appeared to be a Discourse which placed significant value upon the attainment of “cross-cultural” friendships.

Jamie, a white American, elected to stay in a local campus residence hall rather than share accommodation with other American students. She felt that to spend her time primarily with other American students reduced her chances of meeting “local people,” as she called them. For Jamie, this was a critical moment to her experience in South Africa: it was important for her to distance herself from fellow Americans in order to better take up a new social position within the local student population.

Sarah, another white American student, commented upon the previous semester during which she had spent studying abroad in Spain, noting that she had spent most of her time there with other Americans. This decision, she found, had kept her from meeting her Spanish classmates. Therefore, at UCT she was determined to take a different course of action. She shared,

I didn't make nearly as many friends [in Spain]. It was good in a way that I came here with a different attitude, like, 'I'm not going to hang out with Americans, I'm going to make friends,' to make a conscious effort to do that. I think that a lot of students just hang out with Americans...

She noted that this choice on her part also influenced her course selection: she chose classes based on the likelihood of there being fewer American students in them. Sarah was conscious of and deliberate about these choices. She expressed her belief that a conscious effort on her part was required to step out of familiar cultural models and to meet new people, to become literate within new social Discourses.

As exemplified by Jamie and Sarah, the majority of interviewees managed the with-whom-to-socialize question by looking outside the “American citizen Discourses” in which they belonged for significant social interaction. One potential cause for this might have been the presence of over 500 American study abroad students at UCT during that semester. As Margaret pointed out, “I guess because there are so many Americans here...it's easy to spend time with only Americans...” A concerted effort to create social distance and adopt new

social practices was required in order for students to gain familiarity within new Discourses at the host institution.

Evan experienced a critical moment in this theme, noting how sharing a common interest was a great way to meet local students. He was able to enter a local “road-running Discourse.” He said,

I run, and so I’ve found a running group on campus [...] Most times it will be me and 10 South Africans and it’s just absolutely incredible because I feel so far removed from that American starting point. That’s what I want. I don’t want to be tied down to that, and it’s hard to get away from that in a lot of places.

Evan utilized the embodied cultural capital he had gained in previous experiences – athletic ability and enjoyment of social exercise – in order to take up a meaningful social position at UCT.

However, while many interviewees stated that it was important to get to know other students besides Americans, at the same time most of them felt that it was also vital to socialize with others who shared similar cultural models. The Discourses and cultural models present at UCT were unfamiliar enough that many students expressed the need for an individual with whom they could share their experiences and receive support. This desire for social capital was identified by many as an essential component to their overseas journey.

For example, Margaret stated that coming to UCT with others from her home university provided important social connections upon which she could draw when the need arose. She said, “There are about 20 people from Princeton who are here, and that helped a lot because the first few weeks we travelled together... I actually didn’t know most of them until I got here, but it was a really nice way [to begin], [to have] people I could count on...” Holle, a fourth year student from Germany, identified the arrival of another student from Germany as a support to her own journey: they were able to navigate the newnesses of Cape Town together. She explained,

What was also cool, a person from my home university arrived the second day [after my arrival in South Africa] and she didn’t have a clue what she wanted to do and had a really rough time. So she ended up staying in my room the first two months, and we kind of got to know the place together.

Nicole also stressed how important it was for her to have someone she could relate to. An American who came to UCT together with her boyfriend, Nicole remarked, “I think it would be a whole lot harder if you didn’t have anybody...It’s big having somebody to talk to.”

The majority of interviewees represented an intentionality about forming social connections with students other than Americans; a number of them stated that this was one of

the primary reasons they had come to South Africa. Nevertheless, many students also felt that it was important to have a measure of available social capital, most often in the form of a fellow student with whom they shared familiar cultural models. However much students wanted to cross perceived cultural boundaries, it was necessary for many to have someone with whom to connect for social support and encouragement in the midst of unfamiliarity.

National and racial identity

The second cluster of critical moments related to often-tacit Discourses of national and racial identity. Regardless of nationality, the majority of students described how their nation of origin significantly influenced their study-abroad experience. Although reported less frequently, a number of interviewees experienced critical moments in terms of racial identity, as well. The interviewees' experiences in regards to these issues appeared to be an inextricable part of their habitus, whether they liked it or not. This occurred not only in the ways represented above, where (particularly American) students sought to separate themselves from other Americans. Rather, it was an integral of students' subjectivity and had an unavoidable influence on how they were treated by others.

It is interesting to note how strongly national identity, and its influence upon students navigational choices, arose across most of the interviews. This might come as a surprise or even a contradiction, considering the expanding influence of globalization and the growing emphasis upon internationalization within higher education. However, as Dolby (2007) found in her research on study-abroad participants, the concept of "nation" continues to play a powerful role in shaping identity and the sense of self (for further discussion, see Chapter 2).

Two students believed that their national identity exerted a positive influence on their social encounters with others. Margaret, a white American, stated that she felt very comfortable at UCT and considered Cape Town to be quite similar to America. She noted, "I guess this [experience] has made the world a lot smaller, because there are more similarities than differences. ... It has made the world a lot smaller, it's made people seem a lot closer." This topic arose several times in our interview and appeared to be a critical moment for Margaret: she came to realize how alike people can be to one another regardless of national citizenship or racial background.

Sarah expressed a similar response. Expecting a culture similar to Europe, where she had studied previously and felt out of place, here she reported that felt right at home. She shared,

I feel so comfortable here, I am thinking about coming back, maybe doing my graduate degree here. I just love Cape Town! I've fallen in love with it. [...] I love the cultural mix and the context. It's so much fun and so alive. It's so American, too, when you think about it. Everyone said it was like Europe, but having been in Europe I thought it was different. I just find the people so much friendlier.

The particular practices and cultural models she had encountered in Cape Town were familiar to Sarah; it somehow reminded her of home. In addition, Sarah believed that her identity as an American gave her valuable symbolic capital in the new social locale: "Being an American is a good thing – people are interested in you. That's a spark for conversation." However arbitrary such an attribution may be, it nevertheless gave her social power and aided her in taking up a position in new social spaces.

Although in an unexpected manner, Jessica also reported that her knowledge of certain practices or "American dance Discourses" was "a good thing." She said,

One of the funniest things to me is that on more than one occasion I've been pinned as an American because, quote, 'I know how to dance,' which I never expected to hear! I was like, 'Really?', and they're like, 'Yeah, white South Africans don't dance, so we know since you're dancing well, you're from America.'

Within the local club scene Jessica found her cultural capital to be embodied in a very tangible sense, granting her new and heightened symbolic capital.

Chips, a student from Zambia, also found that certain practices which she regarded as quite "normal" for Zambians transmuted into embodied cultural capital in new social settings, granting her valuable symbolic capital and power. She explained that when she and her Zambian friends hosted parties at the university they regularly provided the beverages, a practice which she reported was the social norm in Zambia. "Anybody can just drink it...", she said. "That's how we do it in Zambia. They [her South African friends] are used to the way of going out and taking your drinks with. We don't do it like that in Zambia...so [my South African friends] thought, 'Oh, they're so rich.'" Chips was simply enacting the social practices she considered typical within a national Discourse of hospitality in Zambia. However, this taken-for-granted manner of acting and valuing was recognized as powerful symbolic capital in the new social setting, where such practices were unusual.

Evan and Jamie, both white American students, reported that their nationality was something to keep from public view as much as possible. However, they discovered that the "American linguistic Discourse," particularly the accent and pattern of speech, was difficult to hide. However, once it became known it granted them new symbolic capital.

For example, Evan believed that he was able to blend into certain Cape Town practices through a similar manner of dress; regardless of his apparel, however, his nationality became clear as soon as he opened his mouth. Referring to his previous semester studying in Europe, he related, “In Italy people could tell I was American based on my appearance...but here no one knows I’m an American until I open my mouth... I can blend in much more here. At least you have a little bit of cover. But in Italy everybody knew you were an American.” Evan wanted to blend in and to play the part of a local, but his embodied capital, such as his accent, gave him away.

Also admitting that her accent was a give-away for her nationality, Jamie reported that her manner of speech began to change quite quickly. Whether conscious of it or not, Jamie’s habitus realized the benefit of a changed speech pattern in order to accrue linguistic capital and, therefore, power in the new social field. She shared,

One thing is the accent – [it] definitely gave away that I was an American. And funny enough I’ve been able to – I still can’t really do a South African accent – but I’ve spent enough time with white South Africans who have that accent and they said, ‘Yeah, I can’t even tell you’re from America.’[...] They can tell I’m not from here, but it’s a more neutral accent, and so... not that I go around trying to sound like them...

Although stating that it was unintentional on her part, Jamie seemed pleased that her South Africans friends couldn’t tell that she was from the United States. This new power which Jamie apparently enjoyed illustrates the arbitrariness of the recognition, or mis-recognition, of symbolic capital: her accent had likely not earned her admiration amongst her friends back home.

Lastly, several interviewees expressed a self-awareness that the ways in which the “nationhood Discourses” into which they had been socialized back home played an integral part in their present social encounters. It was an unavoidable part of their habitus and influenced how others treated them whether they wanted it to or not.

Evan addressed this reality when he pointed out,

Yeah, I guess little things that follow you over here, like I’ve had people ask me where my American flag is... [...] Little frustrations that you feel you have to overcome. It’s tiring after a while to constantly deal with people’s perceptions of America that have very little to do with you.

Evan was uncomfortable with the treatment he received from local students, a treatment which in his view was based on his country of origin. In their eyes his national identity as an American meant that he arbitrarily belonged to certain “patriotic American Discourses,” some of which he did not feel a part.

Jamie experienced a similar critical moment. She found that her American identity had given her a type of symbolic capital in the eyes of her South African friends with which she was uncomfortable. She explained,

I've had a few friends – it didn't last very long – but we would go out, a couple of my American friends with a few South African friends, and they would always get us to pay for things. At first we were like, 'Oh yeah, that's fine, whatever, I get it,' but after a while you start wondering, 'Are you just friends with me because you think I'm going to pay for you?' That was frustrating.

In Jamie's perception, these students assumed that her nationality meant she had money to spend. This was a "rich American Discourse" of which Jamie did not want to be a member.

Tiffany, a black American student, reported that she rarely spoke up in class, a choice which she attributed in part to her country of origin. She felt that the local students in her class did not value any of the cultural capital she may have possessed precisely because of her status as a foreigner in South Africa. She shared,

I feel uncomfortable in the classroom. I feel like I don't have the right to speak about things because I'm not from here. So I feel uncomfortable, I feel if I do speak they'll attack me. [...] Even though I know that I'm well-versed in certain topics, that I know I have something to say, I just feel like they'll discredit what I say just because I'm American.

Tiffany felt that her views would be ignored because of her national identity, and thus was tentative to speak up in class.

Margaret, too, felt that she was treated differently simply because she was from the U.S. She reported that when she visited nightclubs she felt that South African guys treated her worse than they would have treated a South African woman. Why? In Margaret's view this was because American women had the reputation of being liberal, or "easy." That is, American women were viewed as being more open to flirtation than South African women. Margaret's embodied cultural capital as a woman from the U.S. precipitated a critical moment for her: in that context it increased the amount of male attention she received. However, this was not the sort of symbolic power she was interested in possessing.

The practices and symbolic capital of "being an American" influenced other international students, as well. Holle, a postgraduate student from Germany, noted that Americans tended to dominate the various IAPO-sponsored social events provided for all international students at UCT. Holle felt that her experience was somehow devalued because she did not possess the social and symbolic capital which the American students seemed to enjoy. She shared,

There are some uncomfortable places... What comes first to my mind is American students at a braai. If you have a braai with a lot of international students, and many of them are American...they don't understand what you're talking about. To make this connection with American students is very, very difficult. [...] For me it's difficult to get on the ground, to participate – it seems like their experiences are much more valuable... I'm not able to express myself at the same level that they are, and [since it is] unbalanced numbers-wise, [it is] sometimes a weird situation.

The American students seemed to enjoy greater power simply because they formed a majority within the international student population. This enabled them to influence, however arbitrarily and unconsciously, the legitimate social – and linguistic – practices at such gatherings.

Not only did critical moments arise due to national identity; racial identity was also a significant factor in causing incongruities in the study-abroad journey.

Tiffany, a black student from the U.S., reported that she had expected to “blend in” to South African culture due to her race. She said that she attempted to practice this “blending” regularly while on the streets of Cape Town. However, although her skin color often enabled her to remain inconspicuous, she could not completely hide other parts of her habitus from scrutiny, notably her American accent. Once her nationality became known she found that she was regarded differently: she was suddenly and arbitrarily recognized as possessing powerful symbolic capital. She explained,

I can get away with a lot more here than a lot of other students could. I mean, it's kind of a balance. If I don't speak, it works perfectly well, but then if I open my mouth, they'll ask for money or whatever. [...] I knew before I came that if I kept my mouth shut I could blend in.

By appearance alone Tiffany was accepted as a member of local South African Discourses. However, once her accent became known, her membership was rescinded and she was granted membership in a “rich American Discourse.” Tiffany's identity as a black-American affected how she navigated the social practices she encountered in the host country, and appeared to cause unique critical moments in her journey.

One particular interaction with a South African classmate stood out for Tiffany. She reported that she was told, “No matter what you are in the States, no matter what you classify yourself as – you can be black-American, African-American, whatever – here you're just *American*.” This response took Tiffany by surprise: she had never thought of herself in precisely those terms before. Back in the States, she explained, she regarded herself as a “black American,” this serving as an important marker for her identity there. However, national identity trumped racial identity in the new social context. Regardless of how Tiffany

wanted to be recognized, she encountered various cultural models at work which foregrounded her American-ness over her racial make-up. Tiffany's identity as an American influenced not only her own practices but those of her classmates, as well.

While few of the white American students appeared to encounter significant disjunctures due to the race-nation nexus, Margaret, a white American, did. She reported,

Some white South Africans feel more comfortable saying really racist things to me because I look like them. [...] And I had to say, 'No, that's not okay.' I guess they assume that because we're similar – especially because I'm from Texas – that there's a similar racial dynamic in the South, and there really isn't anymore... Everywhere I've been in the States, people don't say [those sorts of things].

These white South African classmates assumed that Margaret's racial and national identity meant she would share similar Discourses, ones that judged others based on race. Her response – that racism, or least racist remarks, are no longer present in the U.S. – is an interesting one. It suggests several powerful Discourses at work: one which declares an American ideology of harmonious race relations, even if such isn't the case, and another which calls for firm patriotism, especially in the face of assumptions expressed by persons from other countries.

The race-nation nexus served as a catalyst for critical moments for both Zambian students. For Chips, these were brought to the fore particularly within the academic setting. In regards to one of her professors she stated,

I felt he was biased against non-UCT students... he would not speak to you. I felt so excluded. He would only speak to you if you're from Britain or from France; that's the only time he'd speak to you.

Although Chips referred first to "non-UCT students" she immediately qualified that with a comment regarding nationality: she felt that she was ignored by the professor because she was from Zambia and not from "white" countries such as Britain or France. Perhaps previous socialization and other known Discourses caused her to interpret the professor's practices in such a light.

Abby, too, felt that skin color in South Africa was a more central issue than it had been for her in Zambia. She reported,

I never experienced the fact of being, of 'I'm *black*,' looking at it from a problem point of view. Here it's like being black is kind of a problem: each time you talk, it's about white or black. I never had that [before]. [...] Where I grew up there were white people too, I had lots of friends who were white. It never just came to me, 'He's white, she's white, I'm black,' and all that.

It frustrated her that people seemed to judge others' actions or attitudes based on race rather than on who they were as individuals. It was something which, eventually, she taught herself to ignore. She said, "But I'm adjusting. I give a deaf ear to those things, I just ignore it."

For Abby and Chips, their national and racial identities were inextricably linked and influential to their study-abroad experience. They appeared to encounter various critical moments in which they found that the cultural and symbolic capital which they possessed in their home countries, and which they had come to take for granted, did not hold the same value in the new social settings (with the exception of Chips' Zambian party habits, discussed above). These disjunctures foregrounded their social power and impelled them to draw upon available resources in order to help them make sense of new practices.

Every student interviewed commented upon how their experience was shaped by their national identity and how their national identity shaped their experience. Some identified similarities between the practices they encountered in South Africa and those of their home country. The majority, however, experienced incongruities of varying kinds. These disjunctures served as critical moments for a number of students, moments which caused them to rethink the taken-for-granted Discourses of nationhood and identity in which they had been accepted members at home.

For example, Tiffany regarded her study-abroad sojourn as an opportunity which had opened her eyes to the wider world. She said, "This has been the best semester that I've ever had. I think it's good to broaden your horizons and to see the world outside of the United States. We live in this bubble, we don't know anything about other countries... so it's good having that experience to learn there's more than just the U.S."

Similarly, Jessica's experience in a political science course served as a critical moment for her by helping her to look at the history of the United States from a new perspective. This caused her to reconsider her own identity as an American. She reported,

[My national identity] was the biggest issue in my politics class just because the perspective on politics is different. We're talking about conflict in world politics which America manages to get itself involved in a lot. So my teacher's pretty blunt about it, she's like, 'Remember that time when America set off nuclear weapons?' You know, she'll just say things that will make you want to crawl under a desk if you're American. But I think it was good to have that perspective because it's kind of very raw and out in the open. You see how certain policy initiatives are viewed by the rest of the world, whereas in America it's like, 'And then we dropped the atom bomb. Okay, next chapter.' So that was interesting.

The class offered alternatives from what she felt were the typical ideological approaches to U.S. history taught in American schools. Jessica expressed an awareness of how ideology shapes Discourses in her country, and that there are others ways of interpreting its history.

Meanwhile, Jamie felt challenged in how she believed issues of race and identity to typically be negotiated in America. She said,

Here there's so much wrapped up in identity, especially race in South Africa. So that's been a really great thing for me to think about because I think a lot of times in the States race is just so taboo, people don't talk about it. It doesn't mean it doesn't exist – it does, very much so – but it's just not talked about which doesn't really allow for much progress. So I think here it's been really great to have to be confronted with those issues, to start thinking about where do I fit in, to think about why am I privileged...

She came to question the power she enjoyed as well as how questions of race and identity were framed by the dominant Discourses in the U.S. It is interesting to note the different responses to “race-in-America Discourses” reported by Margaret (discussed above), Jamie, and Jessica. One denied that racism and prejudice were a problem in the U.S., while the other two felt that, in light of the various incongruities encountered during their study-abroad journey, they were impelled to re-think the ideologies and assumptions which had so powerfully influenced and formed their *habitus* in America.

Academic practices

Similar to their encounters with social practices, some of the academic practices the international interviewees encountered at UCT were familiar and unproblematic, while others represented new practices and foreign Discourses. Some of these appeared to serve as critical moments which foregrounded the capital students had acquired over time at their home institution, capital which oftentimes had a powerful influence upon what they had come to expect of institutions of higher education. How students made sense of and navigated these moments appeared to be crucial to their ongoing study-abroad journeys.

This following discussion begins by focusing upon issues related to technology and support, including registration, access to computers and printers, and the library. The discussion will then turn to themes related to the classroom, such as academic expectations, marking, and tacit procedures.

Academic support: registration, technology and library services

Issues related to academic support represented critical moments for a number of students. For them, how to register for classes or how to print a paper were foreign practices at the host institution and often invoked feelings of frustration. The various practices which made second-nature accessing the internet or printing a paper at their home university were of little help in the new academic context; many students found themselves quite “illiterate.”

Chris felt that registration procedures were “a shock,” although he said that he eventually figured them out. Nevertheless, it was a process for which known practices did nothing to prepare him. He reported,

The very first frustration that we encountered upon coming to South Africa – and this is something that every student faces who comes from abroad – that is, enrolling in courses is no longer an easy thing. You have to run all around campus. [...] It’s a serious process, something I wasn’t familiar with. I mean, you get used to it, you do what you need to do, but it was an immediate shock, like, ‘Oh wow, this is different.’

It is interesting to note Chris’ endeavor to make his difficulty commonplace by assuming that all international students had similar struggles. It is entirely possible that he had discussed the issue with others and confirmed his statement. Or perhaps he did not want to feel that he was the only one lacking the requisite know-how of registering for courses.

Jamie also found herself feeling at a loss in making sense of the campus printing system. She explained, “I don’t know if you’ve had this experience as a graduate student, but...I’ve never had to take less than an hour to print something.” Perhaps Jamie had forgotten what it was like when she first encountered the practices required to successfully use the campus printing system at her own university. By now, these practices had likely become taken-for-granted, like “second nature.” This tacit fluency, however, was of little help when she encountered a new “campus printing system Discourse,” thereby instigating a critical moment in her journey.

Jessica also reported her struggle to make sense of new practices when asked to give advice to a friend about to study abroad in South Africa. She stressed the necessity of bringing a personal computer if one hoped to maintain the level of productivity and connectivity enjoyed at home. She responded,

Definitely bring a laptop [...] That’s been a frustration. [...] I mean, this is a spoiled American thing – but if I didn’t have wireless in my dorm, I don’t know how I would have gotten papers done, I don’t know how I would have connected with anyone at home... So I was really glad I brought my computer.

Jessica readily admitted that she enjoyed technological privileges at her home university, and that this colored how she responded in the new situation. Although explanations for

Jessica's response to disjunctures such as these appeared to serve as a critical moment in her study-abroad journey, as well. After describing several "classroom Discourses" which had caused her considerable frustration, she explained her decision that her academic experience at UCT really wasn't as important as its bearing to her personal development (see discussion of Van Hoof and Verbeeten's study, Chapter 2). She explained, "I've just chalked it up to the fact that my experience is more about self-discovery and cultural experience and not for academic gain." It is quite possible that the "classroom Discourses" in which Jessica had become fluent at her home institution prevented her from acquiring these new literacies. Although other American interviewees were not as explicit as Jessica, a number of them seemed to share her perspective on their experiences in South Africa.

Parenthetically, it is interesting to note how such navigational choices display a lack of fluency within various other cultural models and practices of South Africa. For example, perhaps these students would have made different navigational choices had they understood the continued and significant influence of apartheid's legacy in South African secondary and tertiary education. In a sense, this illiteracy influenced the kinds of critical moments they encountered at a South African university, such as those discussed above. Their habitus' had been shaped in other sorts of objective social spaces, diminishing their ability to make sense of the ways in which power was – and is – distributed in the social and academic fields of South Africa.

Marking and tacit academic procedures

The subject of marking, and related issues such as paper-writing procedures, caused considerable consternation for a number of interviewees. Marking practices in South Africa are different from those in the United States. Even I was shocked by the score that was etched at the top of my first paper in my first class at UCT: it was considerably lower than anything I been accustomed to receiving in the U.S. Suspecting a difference in marking practices, practices about which I was clearly ignorant, I immediately sent off a worried email to my professor requesting an explanation. Her clarification put my mind at ease, at the same time helping me gain the requisite insight into South African university marking practices in order to make better sense of it.

Similar to my own experience, this difference in practice created considerable tension for a number of students. Not only were the actual marks different from what interviewees were accustomed to, but some felt that the procedures required for writing papers were often unexplained. This served as a critical moment for these students, one which foregrounded

their lack of fluency within the “marking” and “paper-writing” Discourses of the university. These students were obviously accustomed to achieving a certain level of academic “success” back home and expected to achieve the same here. When they failed to do so, they turned upon the lecturers themselves as the sources of their difficulties. While the professors’ subjectivity was certainly an easy target, it must also be said that some professors’ may indeed have been guilty of unconsciously operating according to taken-for-granted “rules of the game,” rules which seemed obvious to its members but which were opaque for those encountering them for the first time.

Regarding these critical moments, Chris intoned, “Other difficulties? The grading system of course. Major freakout when you first get here, that you’re getting 60% and 70% on everything...” Abby, a fourth year student from Zambia, expressed difficulty in understanding the marks she was given for various written assignments. She felt that the professor’s expectations were never explicitly stated. Abby explained,

[With] some of the lecturers I had a very hard time. [...] I just never knew what they wanted me to do. I would write an assignment and there would not be many comments but the grade would be low, like a 65%, and you go there and ask, ‘What is it I did wrong?’

‘No, not so much, just improve on next time. [You are] just dwelling on trivial arguments.’

‘Well, for you, you see it as trivial arguments, I see it as an important argument. Why don’t you tell me why you think it’s trivial?’

[And the professor replies] something like, ‘No, just work on the next one.’ That would put me off.

In one class she had such trouble learning the legitimate practices for paper-writing that Abby eventually threw in the proverbial towel. “I just gave up,” she moaned. “I didn’t understand what the lecturer wanted. [...] I gave up. I just wrote whatever... as long as I handed in the paper.”

Jessica, an American student, also found paper-writing expectations in her courses to be different from what she had become accustomed to at home. She elaborated,

All of the papers were essentially fact-finding exercises, to a point where not only did they include the exact question that they wanted you to include in the paper – almost to the extent of an outline – but they also gave you a reading list of 12 sources that you were to use for that paper. And to me, that’s like busywork, you know? There’s no thought required.

This served as a critical moment for Jessica. Recall that in the previous section she had relegated her academic experiences to a level of lesser importance in comparison to her personal growth. The academic practices with which she was familiar served for her as tacit

cultural models for judging the quality of her academic experience abroad. It is also interesting to note, as discussed in Chapter 3, how freely Jessica expressed her opinion with me, her American interviewer. She appeared to assume that we shared a similar perspective because of our shared nationality. I imagine that she may have phrased her answers differently had a South African been conducting the interview.

For the most part, the students who appeared to experience critical moments in this area represented Group 2 (see Chapter 3), that is, the group of international student interviewees who came to UCT from countries other than the U.S. Three of the four students in Group 2 detailed their frustrations regarding tacit academic procedures.

For example, Chips, a Zambian fourth-year student, struggled with the proper way to word academic papers for her postgraduate courses. She reported,

Then school began, and they told us, ‘You write this way,’ and then I started asking people, you know, ‘How do you do it?’ Because it’s my first time here and I really wanted to do well. [...] And the people just say, ‘Just do it, just write.’ It was so frustrating, it was so annoying. [...] You can ask them, but they assume that everybody’s at that level because you’re postgraduate, but they don’t understand that we’re coming from different places, that we’ve never been to UCT [before].

The presence of tacit expectations created a significant critical moment for several students, such as Chips. These students’ lack of appropriate cultural capital seriously influenced their academic experience, even after seeking guidance from professors.

Abby reported that she sought similar guidance from her professors on several occasions, but continued to struggle to understand what seemed like an “insider language” spoken by her professor. She shared,

[Professors] sort of don’t speak directly. A professor back home will tell me, ‘What you say here, what you’ve written here, it’s not very right,’ or, ‘Your argument is not very good.’ Directly they would tell me that. ‘I’m not very happy with the work you’ve done here.’

But here they would kind of speak in an indirect tone [...] I don’t know what they are talking about. What is this that they are wanting me to do? [...] I have to imply what they want me to do. And I don’t like that, because it keeps on making me wonder, ‘What is it that he wants me to do, that she wants me to do?’

Whereas Abby likely enjoyed fluency within the “marking” and “paper-writing” Discourses during her undergraduate studies at her home university in Zambia, these literacies did not help her in her postgraduate studies at UCT. She found that she needed to learn a new set of practices, to gain new sorts of capital, in order to produce legitimate academic discourse in the new academic setting.

Holle, a German postgraduate, experienced similar difficulties that were compounded by the fact that she had to write academic papers in a language she was still trying to master. One problem arose when she discovered that there was a final examination required at the end of the semester. She said, “The day you came into our class I just found out that we had to write final examinations. I had never heard this term... [...] I had never written an exam [before].” For her, the system of final examinations was different from what she was familiar with back home. In German universities, she explained, students are required to submit a final paper rather than sit for a final examination. She had not expected any further requirements since she had already written two papers for her course. Thus, when she heard about the exam she was quite upset. She continued,

I was really, really angry. [...] I thought I kind of understood what it was about. [...] The tutor and everybody found it so natural that we write [the final exam], [and so] nobody mentioned it. There were four other American students in my tutorial, and also for them [a final exam] was totally normal. [...] I was really upset.

The presence of a final examination remained tacit for much of the semester; it was assumed as a matter of course that every student would be aware of it. However, for some visiting students, such as Holle, this particular set of unexplained academic practices delivered an alarming shock.

Conclusion

The act of leaving friends, family, and a level of comfort with familiar Discourses at the home university requires courage and a modicum of risk. Disjunctures to subjectivity occur as new objective social spaces are encountered, causing critical moments to arise in the journey of the student-navigator. These moments foreground the capital required for meaningful practice in new social fields and reveal new “stakes of the game” which influence the valuation and use of that capital. Capital which was previously and arbitrarily valuable in acquiring power is differentially recognized, or mis-recognized, in the new setting; perhaps the student finds the position or power s/he once enjoyed now diminished, or that his/her cultural capital has been endowed with new symbolic power. Some familiar literacies may be drawn upon in encountering these incongruities and making sense of unfamiliar Discourses – new ways of speaking, acting, dressing, and valuing – in new contexts, but this may not always be the case. In some, the student is simply “illiterate” or, at best, engages in “mushfaking” (see Chapter 2).

Regarding social practices, the people with whom students had socialized back home quite likely shared a set of common cultural models and assumptions. However, the movement into unfamiliar social settings emphasized an important decision for students: seek out others who shared such models or take a risk by seeking to develop social bonds with students of dissimilar backgrounds. The student's relative social position and capital is foregrounded in doing so.

Likewise, national and racial identity was brought into strong relief as students encountered new practices and cultural models. Never before had they seriously considered their probably-tacit acquisition of the ways of speaking, acting, and believing required for legitimate membership within the particular "nationhood Discourses" in which they had been raised. They were accustomed to their cultural and symbolic capital earning them certain recognition and power back home. When that capital was recognized – or mis-recognized – differently in new social spaces, they were compelled to respond.

In terms of academic practices, when academic practices did not fit students' preconceived, and likely tacit, expectations regarding tertiary educational practice, some students appeared to respond with a critical attitude. They seemed to "write off" the academic side of their sojourn abroad as less relevant to their lives, deciding that for them the bigger lessons lay in extra-curricular experiences beyond the curriculum. Others appeared to negotiate these new practices with a more positive and flexible mindset. In both cases, the interviewees encountered critical moments in their forward journey which had to be navigated and made sense of. Those who appeared to display an openness to the newnesses of the host institution and a flexible, patient attitude had perhaps been socialized into more flexible cultural models, or had learned how to adapt to foreign practices through previous international travel. This enabled them to step outside of their perspective and to accept that things may be done differently – yet legitimately – in other parts of the world. Their habitus was such that they could allow for differences in practices encountered in the host country. On the other hand, those who were less open to unfamiliar Discourses appeared to focus largely on the *fact* of such differences, and not on what might be learned through an open engagement with them.

Encounters with unfamiliar practices in both domains caused various critical moments to arise in interviewees' journeys. The students appeared to engage in a type of iterative compare-and-contrast activity in order to make sense of them, often without being conscious of so doing. In response to my interview questions, students often verbalized how they felt the present practices were different from what they were accustomed to. They depended upon

their familiarity with tacit cultural models and taken-for-granted practices to guide them in making sense of and judging new ones. Such iterative comparisons helped them, however arbitrarily or inaccurately, to feel that they could make sense of unfamiliar practices, and perhaps move more confidently in and out of them. This comparison activity appeared most often with regards to academic practices, indicating how taken-for-granted beliefs impact the students' conceptions of what makes for a good university, lecturer, or library, and highlights how these beliefs powerfully influence – often unconsciously – students' navigational choices in unfamiliar academic settings.

What also became clear in analysis of the interview data is that students' constantly moved in and out of social and academic practices: they routinely cut across the themes I had set up at the outset of the project. In reality, students' lives did not fall neatly into the categories I had created. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

One student in particular cut across these categories in insightful ways, and in fact turned my research question on its head: how do the navigational choices of visiting students impact the host university/nation/culture? Evan, a white American student, turned my question the other way round, suggesting that study-abroad programmes cannot solely be focused upon the personal benefits participants are meant to gain from such a journey (see discussion of these assumed benefits in Chapter 2). The ways in which visiting students impact their hosts must also be explored: whether or not these effects are beneficial, and especially if they may possibly be detrimental.

Evan felt that it was imperative for leaders of study-abroad programmes to consider how their programmes – and the students who participate in them – influence the various practices of the host university/nation/culture. Study-abroad programmes may serve as “institutionalized risk environments” for visiting international students (see discussion on Giddens, Chapter 3), but at what expense to those who live there permanently? Evan explained,

There's so much talk about what *you* get out of it. There's a lot of taking and not a whole lot of giving back... You can't interact and live in an environment and have no influence. People are going to change their perceptions of Americans based on you and they're going to change their behavior based on you... A big question is whether we're bringing the wrong things to the table and starting to affect that purity of a culture that we're so desperately trying to grasp and get a hold of. [...] I'm a huge proponent of study-abroad, but if we're doing this I think you have to seriously look at it from an ethical standpoint. You could be leading literally to cultural degradation, in my opinion, based on your money and your desire to get away. I think that has to be dealt with with the utmost care. [...] When you have people who are culturally insensitive and disrespectful you are doing something that is very questionable.

Evan's observations are insightful, and cut across not only the social and academic domains but issues of national and racial identity, as well. The crux of the matter is that international students do not merely pass in and out of unfamiliar Discourses, gaining, losing and using capital along the way; their very acts of navigation leave indelible marks upon the practices of the host culture, for better or for worse. As discussed in Chapter 2, the assumption that the study-abroad is by definition a positive one must be questioned (Van Hoof and Verbeeten, 2005). Towards that end, the ways in which students navigate unfamiliar practices deserves further attention from concerned academics, particularly in regards to the influences of tacit cultural models which unconsciously guide this navigation. Study-abroad programmes are a powerful conduit of influence which flows in *both* directions, and possess the potential not only to benefit but also to harm both the participants and their international hosts.

technological discrepancies could have been sought, Jessica depended rather on a familiar cultural model as the standard for what was considered adequate technological services at a large university.

Academic expectations

Besides technology and support, a number of students experienced critical moments in relation to various academic practices related to the classroom and the curriculum. They were accustomed to various “classroom Discourses” at their home university which they considered – probably quite tacitly – as exemplars of acceptable classroom practices. When these students encountered unfamiliar “classroom Discourses” at the host institution, then, they deemed them sub-par in comparison to what they knew back home.

Jamie felt that the quality of her lecturers was below what she was accustomed to at her home institution and reported her struggle to find class-time academically motivating. She explained,

I’ve been very frustrated with the quality of the lectures and I guess I’m used to very highly esteemed lecturers who not only are very smart and well-read and have published numerous papers but who also have good person-to-person communication skills. The ones here, not so much. I’ve had a few lecturers who come with a speech prepared, sit down, say ‘Good morning class,’ and start reading off the thing...and then walk out.

The academic practices at the host institution presented Jamie with a new set of incongruities. In order to make sense of them, she drew upon the likely tacit cultural models she had acquired at her home university as the measure for how all lecturers should conduct themselves in class.

Several students commented similarly. Their habitus’, socialized within a particular sphere of higher education at their home universities, did not fit as well within new spaces of the academic field. Their response was to essentialize those known practices, using them as the standard for judging practices at UCT.

Nicole reported having an especially trying experience in a language course. She said, “I feel that academically I’ve actually become a worse student from being here.” Nicole spent considerable time in the interview cataloguing the struggles she had faced in this course, including what she felt to be the unexplained expectations of her professor. These struggles were critical moments in her journey, and she appeared unable to acquire a sufficient amount of “literacy” not only to manage the language-learning but also to understand her professor’s academic requirements.

Chapter 5: The study-abroad experience: a complex journey

At this juncture we must return to the beginning and consider whether the brief journey undertaken by this thesis has been worthwhile. The aim of this project was to explore how international students navigate the social and academic practices of a South African university. Throughout the previous chapter a number of interpretations have been suggested regarding the sorts of practices which my international interviewees encountered and how they served as critical moments in their study-abroad journeys. Key themes have been presented and explored using representative student quotations and my own observations.

In this chapter I will explore two findings which deserve closer attention and conclude by offering suggestions for future study-abroad programmes.

Social and academic practices: real life defies categorization

Throughout this thesis I have discussed practices in terms of two domains: those which I deemed “academic” and those which are “social.” I am well aware that this division between social and practices is an artificial one. Since all human interactions are by nature social, the practices which I chose to call “academic” are of course entirely “social,” as well. However, it is still valid to maintain this distinction, for social interaction and meaning-making in the academic realm is unique unto itself. This was also a helpful methodological decision for the purposes of this thesis, for it encouraged a sharpened analysis of those practices which take place more routinely within the academic setting. On the other hand, analyzing the data based on these two domains also potentially closed down other perspectives which might have yielded other findings. In either case, the ways in which students negotiate the real world defies simplistic categorization.

While students often navigated in ways that cut across my themes, they did appear to negotiate unfamiliar academic practices differently from unfamiliar social practices. In the latter they seemed to have more confidence that they would, in the end, come to learn “the rules of the game” (even if they would not use those exact words). They had more confidence in their social abilities to meet people and to find a place within new social settings. Their familiarity with ways of speaking, acting, dressing, and valuing in other Discourses gave them some “wiggle-room” or space to try out those known practices in new situations, to see what worked and what didn’t, and to change or adopt their behaviour (or speech or dress, etc.) where necessary. Their habitus’ had access to such cultural capital that they seemed able to re-position themselves socially in a variety of ways.

In contrast, this did not seem to be the case in how they navigated academic practices. Here, they appeared much more frustrated in their attempts to learn the legitimate ways of “doing academia” in order to achieve the “success” many of them were used to enjoying at their home universities. Many students seemed at a loss in how to make sense of the incongruities they faced. The “wobble-room” they enjoyed in terms of social practices was significantly restricted in the academic realm. The students’ opportunities for acquiring or using capital were diminished. Repositioning themselves in new spaces within the academic field was a more complex and less manageable procedure than in the extra-curricular social world.

The fact that the complexity of real life defies simple categories provides a reflective turn for the researcher, as well. Do I come to the research with pre-conceived theories and notions of how to categorize the data? Or do I seek a kind of grounded theory, a method where I seek to allow a framework to arise from the data itself? In this project I aimed for a combination of the two. I chose sociocultural theories which I felt would strongly frame my approach and guide my interpretation of the data, but also sought to formulate my categories based on how the data clustered into themes. While I believe this to have been a helpful approach in elucidating how students navigate, at the end of the day it is but a small step in that direction.

Be that as it may, this thesis suggests that further research of academic practices, as a sub-set of social practices, may bring insight to the nature of social interactions within academic settings, particularly as study-abroad participants navigate them. Gee and Bourdieu, with their interest in the use and distribution of power specifically within educational settings, would be natural theoretical choices. The work of Basil Bernstein (1975; 1986; 2000) would also provide an insightful epistemological framework. As discussed in Chapter 2, programme leaders cannot simply assume that the study-abroad experience will be a positive one, and that students who do well academically at home will do well abroad. More qualitative studies from a sociocultural perspective are needed in order to interrogate such assumptions and better understand how the students themselves experience studying and living abroad.

National and racial identity: a complex nexus

I was initially surprised by how strongly and regularly national and racial identity arose as catalysts for critical moments in many students’ journeys. Although I had considered that the geo-political realities of the twenty-first century would be a factor in their experiences, I had not expected national identity to be as strong an influence as their

representations indicated. While certainly facing new and unfamiliar practices during my first semester at UCT, I did not recall facing any major disjunctures in this area. Perhaps I had already come to take for granted various practices and cultural models at UCT and in South Africa, having lived in the country for a longer period of time. Be that as it may, based on the findings of this thesis, concepts of nationhood, citizenship, and racial background – and the national and international ideologies that are intertwined in and through them – exert a powerful influence upon the study-abroad experience.

As discussed in Chapter 4, this may come as a surprise considering the growing emphasis upon internationalization within institutions of higher education. In addition, the effects of globalization and the development of various technologies have almost literally brought the world to one's doorstep. One might expect, then, that the power of "nation" to influence students' identities would be diminished. Nevertheless, this study suggests that critical moments arise due to such influences, and are unavoidable.

This reality adds another layer of complexity to the evaluation of how students experience and negotiate the newnesses of studying and living in a foreign setting. A student's nation of origin – and the cultural models and Discourses acquired from living there – impact upon practice, particularly when those tacit models bump into new and unfamiliar ones. Incongruities arise which demand sense-making navigational choices, choices which appear less clear to the student precisely because the setting is a foreign one.

This is an area of international education which deserves greater attention as globalization and internationalization will likely continue their influence in the realm of higher education across the globe. This emphasis within future research is particularly important because the literature tends to play down national origin in favor of what is called a "global citizenship." As Dolby (2007) discovered, even though the concept of "nation" has come to be seen as socially-constructed and dubious, it nevertheless continues to act as a powerful identity marker for students studying overseas. While policy-makers tout the benefits of studying abroad in making the student a "global citizen," the students themselves do not necessarily subscribe to such a persona (for further discussion, see Chapter 2). Again, as stated above, policies which tacitly assume the positive effects of study-abroad must be substantiated.

A component of the research design delineated in Chapter 3 was the designation of two groups of interviewees for purposes of validation and comparison. Group 1 consisted of nine students from the U.S. and Group 2 of four students from other countries: two from Zambia and two from Europe. The experiences of the two sample groups did not appear to be

significant. However, students within the latter group did report two obstacles which were not commonly reported by the American students.

First, both of the Zambian students described particular critical moments regarding race and nationhood, reporting several instances which were unexpected and challenging. Abby spoke extensively about how keenly aware she was of “being black” due to her experience in Cape Town, while Chips felt that she was judged in the classroom because of her race and nationality. They were both clear in articulating their frustrations with these instances. Although all of the American students in Group 1 discussed critical moments in relation to national identity, fewer reported experiencing incongruities regarding their racial background. It is possible that the cultural models and Discourses in which Abby and Chips had previously been socialized caused them to be more cognizant of disjunctures in this domain.

The second experience unique to Group 2 was related to writing academic papers in the English language. These critical moments arose particularly for the students from Germany and Denmark. They both expressed frustration regarding this issue, but at the same time said that to acquire such skills was one of their reasons for coming to South Africa in the first place.

Aside from these two features, my interpretation of the students’ practices, as they were represented in the interviews, found remarkable similarities. The themes which arose during data analysis stretched across most of the interviews and appeared to be common experiences for the international students in this thesis. Of course a number of interesting comparisons between the groups could be foregrounded and scrutinized. However, page limitations, as well as my primary interest in the experiences of American students, precluded additional analyses, as fascinating as they would quite likely be.

Gee and Bourdieu in this research: a powerful combination

Gee’s and Bourdieu’s sociocultural theories of the social world are powerful tools for interrogating the distribution of power in social spaces and its impact upon how subjects take up positions within the social world. Their theories provided a solid epistemology for exploring such subjective movement as international students encountered often unfamiliar practices in new objective social spaces.

In Gee’s terminology, Discourses, with a capital “D,” were an ever-present reality of the many social/academic contexts of the host university, and required the student to learn the legitimate ways of speaking, acting, dressing, and believing in order to be granted

membership within them. Where conscious of these instances, some students appeared to intentionally draw upon resources for practice acquired from other known Discourses in order to gain the ways of speaking, acting, dressing, and valuing required by new ones. Of course, much of the time the subjects do this without deliberate or conscious awareness of their having done so. In either case, students had to become literate – even if only in a basic manner – within these Discourses in order to make sense of them and to be recognized as legitimately belonging to them.

In Bourdieu's terms, the power the student possessed, or the lack thereof, became foregrounded as the habitus moved in and out of new spaces of the social/academic fields. For the majority of my international interviewees, this movement caused incongruities of various kinds in relation to the type and value of the student's capital; it arbitrarily altered the power they had become accustomed to enjoying at their home institution and was the cause of various critical moments wherein they had to make choices of practice, conscious or otherwise. Students often turned towards various types of available cultural or social capital in order to do so, or sought to acquire new forms of capital which might enable them to acquire power and effectively reposition themselves in the field.

I do not pretend to have used these theoretical approaches to their full potential in this research, and feel that this project is but the tip of the iceberg in their application. I believe that Gee and Bourdieu offer a set of sociocultural theories which offer unique and profound insight into how international students navigate the study-abroad experience, and ought to find a more prominent place in the research literature.

Next steps: Suggestions for study-abroad programming

One of my present concerns, based in part on what I have learned while conducting this research, is that students are not adequately prepared for studying and living in another country. Perhaps this inattention is due to an unfounded and tacit confidence, discussed elsewhere in this thesis, that students who do well at the home university will find similar success at the host institution. It may be assumed that students are young and adventurous and will find ways to adjust to any challenges they may encounter. Thus, as Pires et al. (2000) concluded, pre-departure orientation programmes are often poorly organized and inadequate.

However, this is an aspect of study-abroad programmes which demands attention, for to leave familiar social surroundings and to cross national and cultural borders in order to enter new and potentially very different social spaces promises to create unique challenges for the participant. Upon arrival at the host university the student almost immediately

encounters disjunctures of various kinds. These may be unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and unavoidable. The student *must* navigate them but is not exactly sure how to do so, or where to begin. Below is my attempt to outline a way in which students might be more adequately prepared for such a journey.

What follows is not, however, an attempt to provide a complete and absolute “map” of the student’s upcoming international experience. This would be neither possible nor desirable. Rather, it is a particular perspective, based on the concepts developed by Gee and Bourdieu, which may equip the student with a set of navigational tools which can be drawn upon in his/her encounters with new social contexts.

In studies exploring the orientation components of study-abroad programmes, several authors have confirmed that this is an area which does not receive the attention it deserves, and even demands. Woolf (2007) notes the necessity of providing constructive guidance for the student who is planning to enter an overseas social and academic environment. He writes, “The assumption that a foreign national system can be easily and fully penetrated by a student coming with diverse expectations and cultural conditioning needs to be carefully examined” (498). No educational system is neutral or value-free: each reflects the culture – itself also a contested term – in which it is embedded.

Vande Berg (2007) corroborates Woolf’s point. He writes that in previous decades scant attention has been given to preparing students for overseas study. Students who did well at the home institution, it had long been assumed, would find success at the overseas university, as well (393). However, he notes that study-abroad professionals are becoming convinced of the importance of *actively* helping student learning to occur during a semester abroad. He writes, “...We have become interventionists, convinced that if our students are to learn effectively, we need to intervene, before, during, and after their experiences abroad to shape and support their learning” (394). Sending them off with a few words of encouragement is simply no longer adequate if the desired learning is to take place.

Some researchers in the U.S. believe that pre-departure preparation is of particular importance when the destination is Africa. It bears emphasizing that flattening such a large and diverse continent into a one-dimensional entity is inappropriate. Doing so is an injustice to the wide variety of African universities and the ways in which each is a unique study-abroad destination, as well as ignoring the diversity of students who choose to study in them. It must be acknowledged that destinations in Central and South America, Malaysia, and Europe and the United States are *not* unproblematic and may very well require just as much “special attention” during pre-departure preparations. Regardless of their destination,

international students will find that issues related to residential accommodation, curriculum, marking and academic expectations, and myriad other issues, are likely handled differently at the host university. I would argue that pre-departure preparation must be a vital part of any study-abroad programme, regardless of the country – or continent – of destination.

How can we adequately and insightfully prepare students for the unknowns of a semester or a year of studying and living abroad? I am not thinking here of an attempt to prepare students for every potential problem which may occur, a practice which would be time-consuming and ineffective, especially in programmes which send students to a multitude of destinations. Of course some helpful site-specific information can and must be presented before students depart for the host country: not to do so would be negligent.

However, the type of orientation I am suggesting is not concerned with the specific details of any one overseas destination, but rather serves as an approach which teaches the student to take a step back and to see the social world – including his/her agency within it – from a bird's eye point of view. This is a macro perspective on the social world, on practice, on the subjective and the objective, on capital, and on Gee's Discourses. It does not consist of a catalog of every potential issue the student may face but rather a set of mental and social tools which can equip the student to approach and think about the overseas experience, both prior to departure and throughout its duration, from a new perspective. It is a posture of thought, a manner of stepping back and examining familiar and foreign practices from a particular viewpoint that can be introduced to students prior to their study-abroad sojourn. Perhaps it is itself a type of Discourse.

It is not assumed that helping students to see the world in this way would be easy or straight-forward; to step out of one's skin, to take a new perspective on one's experiences with and assumptions about social practices, is not easily accomplished. Nor is teaching such a move a simple procedure. It is a teaching and learning process which requires deliberate preparation by the orientation leader and conscientious effort by the student, likely demanding a high degree of effort. But in the long run, perhaps it would be worth it.

At this juncture I must make an important caveat regarding the acquisition of Discourses, such as the one described here. This is a component of Gee's approach which I was unable to utilize in my research but which I feel to be a crucial point. Gee (2003) notes that mastery of a Discourse comes about only through its acquisition and not only by learning about it in a classroom. In fact, Gee states that teaching a Discourse is less effective than seeing it at work in natural and meaningful settings (144). Thus, to teach this Discourse during a pre-departure orientation programme is only the first step towards enabling students

to personally gain mastery of it. Ultimately, students would not be over and done with acquiring this Discourse by the end of their study-abroad experiences; rather, their overseas sojourn would be the beginning of a life-long journey in understanding the social world from the meta-perspective suggested here.

Considering the above, the curriculum for an orientation programme of this kind would ideally take place over the course of the semester prior to the student's departure for the overseas destination. Further interaction and monitoring of the student's progress may continue via email communication and, ideally, through the aid of on-site staff at the host institution.

The curricular aims would be to enable students to understand some of the social theory developed by Gee and Bourdieu so as to be able to apply them to their own perspectives and experiences of the social world. Students would be encouraged to understand the world through a set of sociocultural lenses which view that world as consisting of primary and secondary Discourses, fields of various kinds, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, and the conscious/unconscious habitus. It would be demonstrated how the student has been influenced by past and present practices and how those influence current practices. The student would be encouraged to identify the implicit "rules of the game" in the social fields in which they move, the stakes to be won or lost therein, and the various types of capital s/he now enjoys and how s/he has acquired them. Gee's Discourses, as ways of speaking/acting/dressing/valuing, as the only legitimate ways of being members of social groups would also be delimited. In short, the aim would be to enable the student to take a new and different view of their subjectivity in the objective social world. I freely acknowledge that, for the student, an orientation programme of this kind would probably feel like drinking out of a fire hose; by no means would s/he be expected to gain a full understanding of the theories. Nevertheless, I believe that a basic curriculum could be structured and taught in a manageable manner.

Of course this focus upon theory must be balanced and operationalized in tangible ways in order to help the student learn its concepts. For example, the student might be encouraged to maintain a self-reflective journal over the course of the semester prior to travel in which s/he would be encouraged to work out these concepts in everyday life. A host of prompts may be considered as fodder for such intellectual ruminations, such as the following: presuppositions regarding what is considered a "good" lecturer style or lecture content; expectations of student academic work and behavior; tacit academic procedures; Discourses of the home university acquired over time but now taken-for-granted as simply what it means

to “be a student,” or to “be a university”; assumptions about how social groups interact on campus, and how one negotiates them; what it means to be an American (or a German or a Zambian) and how that forms notions of legitimate social, political, and cultural practices, and how it influences one’s outlook on the world; how race and skin color influence one’s practices, as well as the practices of others; how economics affect access to resources; and many others. Such exercises, in combination with lectures and assignments, may be a step towards helping the student to acquire a new way of understanding the social world.

The perspective suggested here, then, will hopefully enlarge the student’s capacity to think about social practices, both his/her own and as well as those encountered in unfamiliar settings. It is a curriculum which may equip the student with a new set of lenses for looking at and making sense of the world, whether the destination is Brazil or Belgium, South Korea or South Africa.

What I am suggesting may represent a paradigm shift away from the practices currently typical of orientation programmes. I leave it up to the reader to adjudicate that question. In either case, it is hoped that the suggestions above at the very least provide food for thought for the study-abroad professional as s/he seeks to enable his/her students to engage the wider social world in successful and enriching ways.

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Appendix A

Background information of participants

Group 1

Name	Gender	Race ⁵	Nation of origin	Year of study	Faculty at UCT	Length of studies at UCT
Chris	Male	White	USA	Third	Humanities	Two semesters
Erin	Female	White	USA	Third	Humanities	One semester
Evan	Male	White	USA	Third	Humanities	One semester
Jamie	Female	White	USA	Third	Humanities	One semester
Jessica	Female	White	USA	Third	Humanities	One semester
Margaret	Female	White	USA	Third	Humanities	One semester
Nicole	Female	White	USA	Third	Humanities	Two semesters
Sarah	Female	White	USA	Third	Humanities	One semester
Tiffany	Female	Black	USA	Third	Humanities	One semester

Group 2

Name	Gender	Race	Nation of origin	Year of study	Faculty at UCT	Length of studies at UCT
Abby	Female	Black	Zambia	Postgraduate	Humanities	Two semesters
Chips	Female	Black	Zambia	Postgraduate	Humanities	Two semesters
Helene	Female	White	Denmark	Fourth	Humanities	Two semesters
Holle	Female	White	Germany	Fourth	Humanities	Two semesters

⁵ I use the terms “black” and “white” in order to indicate students’ racial backgrounds. These terms are by no means the best choices: they are, like the concepts of “nation,” “race,” and “culture,” highly contested terms. However, I have chosen to use them for two reasons: first, they are the terms used by my interviewees themselves, and second, one must eventually settle on some kind of terminology if the larger discussion is to move forward.

Appendix B

Ethics form

Thank you for taking part in my research project for the thesis requirement of the MPhil in Education at the University of Cape Town. I value your participation and look forward to further contact with you during the rest of the year.

Your involvement will include an interview (possibly more if you are interested) and interaction over email once you have returned home.

As this is a qualitative study, your contributions will help shape the study as it develops. I undertake to do the following:

- Make sure that your identity will remain anonymous, unless you prefer to retain your identity. We will choose a pseudonym that I will use if I do need to refer to you in the final paper.
- Periodically give you an update as I proceed in putting together the thesis.
- Buy you a cup of coffee every time we get together for an interview.

UCT's Ethics Committee requires that all research participants give consent when participating in a university-based research project. This is to make sure that you understand the process you are involved in, and that research 'subjects' are not exploited. I'd like you to think about this before giving your consent below.

Thank you very much.

Jim Gieser

I agree to take part in this research project and I understand the conditions outlined above.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

Appendix C

Outline used to guide semi-structured interviews with student participants (developed 20 May, 2008)

Begin with *small talk* (10-15 minutes only)

Try to ask a few questions about their *background*:

Where did you grow up?

Describe your family.

Is there anything else that you think would be important for me to know about you?

Briefly tell me about your educational journey through high school.

Tell me about your transition to university academics – challenges? critical moments that helped you adjust? What did you lack when you first arrived but later acquired which helped you feel comfortable academically?

Study abroad

Why did you decide to study abroad? Why did you choose this place? What were you expecting? Do you think you would have different or similar experiences had you gone elsewhere?

Culture

What cultural aspects of your experience were challenging to you? Were there moments or places where you felt like the *outsider*? What did you learn or acquire that helped you feel more like an *insider*?

Academics

What about academics? How did you “define your place” academically *at your home institution*? How has that definition been challenged because of your experience at UCT, and how would you “define your place” here?

Were there moments or places where you felt like the *outsider*? What did you learn or acquire that helped you feel more like an *insider*? What *helped you to navigate* through these challenges?

Geo-political

How did you view yourself *as an American* coming to study in Africa? How has that view been challenged or changed because of your experience?

Conclusion

If things went *well*, what do you think you possessed that contributed to the success of the semester?

If things were *rough*, what do you wish you possessed or known at the beginning?

What would you tell a friend who was about to go study abroad for a semester?

Anything else you would like to add?

One last thing: draw a *river*, and indicate the *critical moments* along your journey – places of log-jam or fast flow; pleasant lazy river or rough rapids....

Appendix D

International students at the University of Cape Town Cape Town, South Africa

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 *
Total UCT students enrolled	18 119	19 315	19 943	20 480	21 356	21 528
Total UCT students (excl. SSA)	17 837	18 940	19 412	19 901	20 666	20 855
Total international students (excl. SSA)	2 254	2 414	3 013	3 329	3 727	3 631
% international students (excl. SSA)	13%	13%	16%	17%	18%	17%
Number of countries represented	74	81	92	97	96	104
Number of African countries represented	?	?	30	29	31	38
Total SADC students	1 603	1 775	2 195	2 360	2 546	2 586
% SADC students at UCT	9%	9%	11%	12%	12%	12%
Total Non-SADC International students (excl. SSA)	651	639	818	976	1 181	1 045
Total Non-SADC International students from Africa	?	212	286	399	442	538
Total Study Abroad Students	282	375	531	579	690	673
Total International Students incl SSA/non-degree seekers	2 536	2 789	3 544	3 908	4 374	4 304
% All International student registrations at UCT	14%	14%	18%	19%	20%	20%
Total international undergraduates	1 291	1 510	1 748	tbc	2 033	2 089
Total international postgraduates	963	904	1 265	tbc	1 467	1 462

* 2006 figures are yet to be confirmed. The figures shown here are per information available at 24/01/2007.

Available from: <http://www.uct.ac.za/about/iapo/overview/statistics/> [20 October, 2008]

Appendix E

UCT POLICY ON INTERNATIONALISATION

Policy Statement

The University of Cape Town's mission is *"to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society"*. It is central to the University's mission that we recognise our location in Africa while acknowledging that a characteristic of excellent higher education anywhere in the world is its global relevance. Globalisation has profoundly affected the way in which countries and businesses operate. In recognition of this, the University of Cape Town strongly supports internationalisation as an essential element of quality higher education and research.

Definition

UCT adopts, as most closely representing its own understanding of the concept, the following definition of internationalization by a leading researcher in the field: It is *"the process of integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher learning"* (Jane Knight 1994). Thus, internationalisation affects curricula, teaching, research, administration, selection and promotion of staff, student recruitment, marketing, experiential learning through student and staff mobility, quality review, social responsiveness, and communication.

Policy Context

This internationalisation policy should be viewed as giving expression to UCT's mission statement and strategic objectives, national legislation and regional treaties on education and training (especially the SADC Protocol) as well as being in line with the Code of Ethical Practice of the International Education Association of South Africa.

Key Principles of Internationalisation at UCT

1. Excellence and Mutual Benefit

Excellence is the benchmark of all internationalisation at UCT. International students should be selected on the basis of merit and academic suitability for a particular programme. Bilateral and multilateral agreements with institutions should be demonstrably to the benefit of all partners to the agreement. Recognising that it is the enthusiasm of the participating individuals, departments and institutions that drives successful international linkages, UCT will only enter into partnerships that have the enthusiastic support of all active participants.

2. Equity and Institutional Culture

Internationalisation at UCT will promote the University's equity and transformation objectives. Exchanges and development opportunities will take into account the under-representation in academic life of women, black people and people with disabilities. Internationalisation should contribute to an institutional culture which values diversity. Every effort must be made to integrate international staff and students fully into the life of UCT.

3. Position in Africa

An important focus of UCT's internationalisation will be the African continent. UCT supports the proposals in the National Plan for Higher Education to increase linkages

within the SADC region and to enroll SADC students on the same terms as local students.

4. Research and Academic Autonomy

UCT strongly supports the rights of academics to develop their own individual academic links and collaborations, both formal and informal.

5. Curriculum

In curriculum matters UCT strives to benchmark itself against international standards without losing sight of the need for course offerings to be relevant to both regional and international conditions.

6. International Student Numbers

The maximum number of international students will be set annually by the Admissions and Progression Committee upon the recommendation of the International Academic Programmes Office, taking into account the need for flexibility and differentiation in respect of undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments. Account will also be taken of the prevailing national policy environment.

Within the parameters of this Policy on Internationalisation, detailed priorities and strategies will be set and reviewed on a regular basis.

Role of International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO)

It is the function of IAPO to lead and co-ordinate the development of internationalisation at UCT, and to promote the integration of diverse communities across the University.

Available at: <http://www.uct.ac.za/about/iapo/internat/>

15 November, 2008